



**DELHI UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY**

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SYSTEM

Cl. No. N2-N19 65  
Ac. No. 4862-00 Date of release of loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below.  
An overdue charge of 10 np. will be charged for each day the book is  
kept overtime.



A SHORT SURVEY OF  
SURREALISM



VALENTINE HUGO : Portraits of Paul Eluard—André Breton—Tristan Tzara—Rene Crevel  
(in course of execution)

# A SHORT SURVEY OF SURREALISM

by

David Gascoyne



FRANK CASS & CO. LTD.

1970

Published by  
FRANK CASS AND COMPANY LIMITED  
67 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3BT  
by arrangement with David Gascoyne

*All rights reserved*

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| First published   | 1935 |
| Second impression | 1936 |
| Third impression  | 1970 |

ISBN 0 7146 2262 1

*Printed in Great Britain by Clarke, Doble & Brendon Ltd.  
Plymouth and London*

---

C O N T E N T S

---

|   |             |     |
|---|-------------|-----|
| Introduction                                      | <i>page</i> | ix  |
| <i>Chapter I</i> Ancestors of Surrealism          |             | 1   |
| <i>Chapter II</i> The Dadaist Attitude            |             | 23  |
| <i>Chapter III</i> The Period of Sleeping-Fits    |             | 45  |
| <i>Chapter IV</i> The First Manifesto 1924        |             | 57  |
| <i>Chapter V</i> The Second Manifesto 1929        |             | 83  |
| <i>Chapter VI</i> Surrealism To-day and To-morrow |             | 126 |

---

T R A N S L A T I O N S

---

|                                     |  |                 |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <i>Andre Breton</i>                 | From: Soluble Fish                             | <i>page</i> 139 |
| <i>Andre Breton</i>                 | The Spectral Attitudes                         | 140             |
| <i>René Char</i>                    | Three Poems                                    | 143             |
| <i>René Char</i>                    | Fatal Sleep                                    | 144             |
| <i>Salvador Dali</i>                | Love and Memory (Fragment)                     | 145             |
| <i>Paul Eluard</i>                  | At the End of a Long Voyage                    | 147             |
| <i>Paul Eluard</i>                  | What the Workman Says is Never to<br>the Point | 149             |
| <i>Georges Hugnet</i>               | Poem   | 153             |
| <i>Benjamin Péret</i>               | Three Poems                                    | 155             |
| <i>Andre Breton and Paul Eluard</i> | Force of Habit                                 | 157             |
| INDEX                               |  | 160             |

---

---

I L L U S T R A T I O N S

---

---

*Portraits of Paul Eluard—André Breton—Tristan Tzara—  
René Crevel (in course of execution)*

|   |  |                     |
|---|--|---------------------|
|   | Valentine Hugo   | <i>frontispiece</i> |
| <i>Dancer (string)</i>                      | Hans Arp (1927)  | <i>page</i> 6       |
| <i>The Fête Day</i>                         | Giorgio de Chirico   | 18                  |
| <i>The Weaning of Furniture-Food</i>        | Salvador Dali (1934)   | 32                  |
| <i>Le Lion de Belfort (collage)</i>         | Max Ernst (1934)   | 48                  |
| <i>The Palace. 4 o'clock in the morning</i> | Composition by Alberto Giacometti (photo: Brassai)   | 64                  |
| <i>On the Threshold of Liberty</i>          | René Magritte (1933)   | 84                  |
| <i>From "An Andalusian Dog" (film)</i>      | Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel (1929)   | 100                 |
| <i>Personage Throwing a Stone at a Bird</i> | Joan Miró (1927)   | 118                 |
| <i>Dinard</i>                               | Pablo Picasso (1928)   | 134                 |
| <i>Breeding Dust</i>                        | Photograph by MAN RAY of part of the painting by MARCEL DUCHAMP; The Bride Stripped Bare by her own Bachelors (unfinished state) | 150                 |
| <i>I am Waiting for You</i>                 | Painting by Yves Tanguy (photo: Man Ray) (1935)  | 158                 |

Confined from early childhood in a world that almost everything he ever hears or reads will tell him is the one and only *real* world and that, as almost no one, on the contrary, will point to him, is a prison, man—l'homme moyen sensuel—bound hand and foot not only by those economic chains of whose existence he is becoming ever more and more aware, but also by chains of second-hand and second-rate *ideas*, the preconceptions and prejudices that help to bind together the system known (ironically, as some think) by the name of “civilisation,” is for ever barred except in sleep from that other plane of existence where stones fall upwards and the sun shines by night, if it chooses, and where even the trees talk freely with the statues that have come down for ever from their pedestals—a world to which the entrance has generally been supposed, up till now, to be the sole privilege of poets and other madmen. For it is undeniably true that the oniric<sup>1</sup> domain is still regarded in very much the same way

<sup>1</sup> The Greeks called the dream: *Onup*, hence Oniru, the god of dreams.

as was the erotic domain during the Victorian era. That the dream is useless, as escape from reality, the dreamer a self-indulgent and lazy person, is the accepted view of an overwhelming majority. How, then, can man reconcile himself to the fact that he spends more than a third of his life on earth in sleep, and that he spends the whole time of his sleeping in a world that his conscious mind so despises?

It is the avowed aim of the surrealist movement to reduce and finally to dispose altogether of the flagrant contradictions that exist between dream and waking life, the "unreal" and the "real," the unconscious and the conscious, and thus to make of what has hitherto been regarded as the special domain of poets, the acknowledged common property of all. So far as the surrealists themselves are either writers or painters, it is also at the same time their aim to extend indefinitely the limits of "literature" and "art" by continually tending to do away with the barrier that separates the contents of the printed page or of the picture-frame from the world of real life and of action.

Taking this attitude as our point of departure,

we are bound sooner or later to envisage a conception of imaginative expression in general, and of poetry in particular, that is almost totally different from that most widely current in present-day England and America—countries where the vital issues of surrealism have been persistently misrepresented and obscured from the moment when, not so long ago, the rumour of this strange new “modern” movement first came to our ears.

Surrealism, profiting from the discoveries of Freud and a few other scientific explorers of the unconscious, has conceived poetry as being, on the one hand, a perpetual functioning of the *psyche*, a perpetual flow of irrational thought *in the form of images* taking place in every human mind and needing only a certain predisposition and discipline in order to be brought to light in the form of written words (or plastic images), and on the other hand, a universally valid attitude to experience, a possible mode of living. It is thus a restatement of the ancient and supposedly discredited notion of inspiration—with a difference. This lyrical element of human thought, the source of all authentic poetry, common to all men did they but realise it, is

manifested in the plays of Shakespeare and in the ravings of lunatics in *Kubla Khan* and in Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies*; in the paintings of Picasso and in popular picture-postcards. "I say that there exists a lyrical element that conditions for one part the psychological and moral structure of human society" (I quote from André Breton), "that has conditioned it for all time and that will continue to condition it. This lyrical element is up to this day, even though in spite of them, the fact and the sole fact of specialists." And when it is said that the aim of surrealism is to break down the barrier separating dream ("poetry") from reality, the irrational from the rational, that is also to say that its aim is to make this "sole fact of specialists" familiar to everyone. Here we have the answer to the problem raised by the apparent contradiction between the artistic attitude of Surrealism and its declared political faith. It should by now be clear to Marxists that the surrealist attitude is totally in accord with the Communist philosophy of dialectical materialism, with its insistence on the synonymity of theory and practice, and that only the imminence of proletarian

revolution allows surrealism to hope that its aims will ultimately be fulfilled. The surrealist cause is the revolutionary cause—in spite of the surrealists' bourgeois origin, in spite of the attitude of certain dogmatic Marxists towards such phenomena as Freudian psycho-analysis and the more complicated developments of modern literature and art, and in spite of such apparent compromises on the part of the Communists as the Franco-Soviet pact and the recent rehabilitation in Russia of the bourgeois conception of the family.

\* \* \*

In the pages that follow I intend to treat the subject by employing a roughly chronological order; this method may have its disadvantages, but by the time we have reached the position of surrealism at the present moment, even the reader who has as yet only the haziest idea of what surrealism means may, I hope, be able to realise its fullest implications. To the reader already well acquainted with the surrealist movement and with the development of French literature during the last century I must apologise for having to go over what must be familiar ground, for this book is intended to serve as an

manifested in the plays of Shakespeare and in the ravings of lunatics in *Kubla Khan* and in Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies*; in the paintings of Picasso and in popular picture-postcards. "I say that there exists a lyrical element that conditions for one part the psychological and moral structure of human society" (I quote from André Breton), "that has conditioned it for all time and that will continue to condition it. This lyrical element is up to this day, even though in spite of them, the fact and the sole fact of specialists." And when it is said that the aim of surrealism is to break down the barrier separating dream ("poetry") from reality, the irrational from the rational, that is also to say that its aim is to make this "sole fact of specialists" familiar to everyone. Here we have the answer to the problem raised by the apparent contradiction between the artistic attitude of Surrealism and its declared political faith. It should by now be clear to Marxists that the surrealist attitude is totally in accord with the Communist philosophy of dialectical materialism, with its insistence on the synonymity of theory and practice, and that only the imminence of proletarian

revolution allows surrealism to hope that its aims will ultimately be fulfilled. The surrealist cause is the revolutionary cause—in spite of the surrealists' bourgeois origin, in spite of the attitude of certain dogmatic Marxists towards such phenomena as Freudian psycho-analysis and the more complicated developments of modern literature and art, and in spite of such apparent compromises on the part of the Communists as the Franco-Soviet pact and the recent rehabilitation in Russia of the bourgeois conception of the family.

\* \* \*

In the pages that follow I intend to treat the subject by employing a roughly chronological order; this method may have its disadvantages, but by the time we have reached the position of surrealism at the present moment, even the reader who has as yet only the haziest idea of what surrealism means may, I hope, be able to realise its fullest implications. To the reader already well acquainted with the surrealist movement and with the development of French literature during the last century I must apologise for having to go over what must be familiar ground, for this book is intended to serve as an

introduction to surrealism rather than to be a work of criticism.

I think I may remark here that although I have entitled my first chapter *Ancestors*, this should not be taken to imply that surrealism is anything but a "latent state of mind, a human attitude in the widest sense of the word human." Surrealism is *not* a style, it is *not* a school of literature or painting, it is *not* a system of æsthetics. Hence its origins are not to be found in any particular epoch, though a number of writers of the last century, particularly in France, provided the immediate impetus to those men who during the last ten or fifteen years have devoted their whole attention to it, have defined it and given it a name, and have considerably enriched both literature and painting, as well as the cinema, by their researches.

\* \* \*

I should like to acknowledge my thanks to MM. Breton, Eluard and Hugnet for their kind assistance in providing me with much information and many documents and publications with regard to the surrealist movement; acknowledgments should also be made to the surrealist writers for permission to

translate the poems, etc., at the end of this volume,  
and to the surrealist painters for the photographs of  
their works that I have used as illustrations.

D. E. G.

*July-September 1935.*



---

## ANCESTORS OF SURREALISM

---

### CHAPTER ONE

“Close your ears to the clatter of bayonets, the yelping of the cannons; turn aside your gaze from the changing tides of battles lost or won; and then you will see an immense shining and inexpressible phantom arise from the shadows; you will see dawning over a whole star-sown epoch the enormous and sinister figure of the Marquis de Sade.” Thus reads the homage of Swinburne to a writer whose mysterious and very potent influence stretches right across the nineteenth century and into our own. Reviled and persecuted by his contemporaries, an object of revulsion and horror to a whole horde of petty moralists since his death, the Marquis de Sade, thanks to a vague and rather doubtful sort of popularisation of psycho-pathology, is known to most people to-day merely by the fact that a certain sexual perversion bears his name. It was only quite recently that the moral and philosophic side of his writings began to receive the serious attention of certain men, particularly of the surrealists. “For having desired to restore to civilised man the force of his primitive instincts,” wrote Paul Eluard in an

article published in the eighth number of the review *La Révolution Surrealiste*, 1926, "for having desired to set free the imagination of love and for having fought desperately for absolute justice and equality, the Marquis de Sade was shut up almost all his life in the Bastille, and in the prisons at Vincennes and Charenton. His work has been delivered to the flames or to the senile curiosity of pornographic writers, who make it their *duty* to misrepresent him. His name has become the synonym of cruel and assassin. Over his indomitable spirit all the diehards have drivelled." Yet it is probable that he would have been content to know that, while regarded as a foul monster by the mob, he has always had the admiration of poets. To them, and to certain others, it is as a revolutionary moralist that he stands supreme, and it is as such that he will continue to influence the thought of courageous men<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The reader wishing for further information should refer to Mr. Geoffrey Gorer's excellent book, *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade* (Wishart, 1934). He may be surprised to find, however, that when Mr. Gorer refers to the influence of Sade on the surrealists, he does so in the following terms: "To-day his most open disciples (though they completely caricature him) are the French surrealistes (sic) with their rather impotent desire for violence, both intellectual and physical." In many other passages

It is inevitable that a survey of surrealism should begin by going back to Sade, for he was in many ways the starting point of the great Romantic movement that rolled across the last century like a theatrical thunderstorm. We are forced to admit that most of its funereal trappings, phantoms, ruins and orientalisms are as derelict and dusty by now as old stage scenery; but it must not be forgotten that it did produce in passing a few men of an importance and significance as startling as that of real lightning-flashes. Such were Sade, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont. A few minor figures also distinguished themselves—Bertrand, Borel, Nerval—by being the first to indicate in their works the existence of the enormous illogical world that the surrealist movement has subsequently brought to light in a more thorough and systematic manner.

**Louis Bertrand, the obscure author of a single**

---

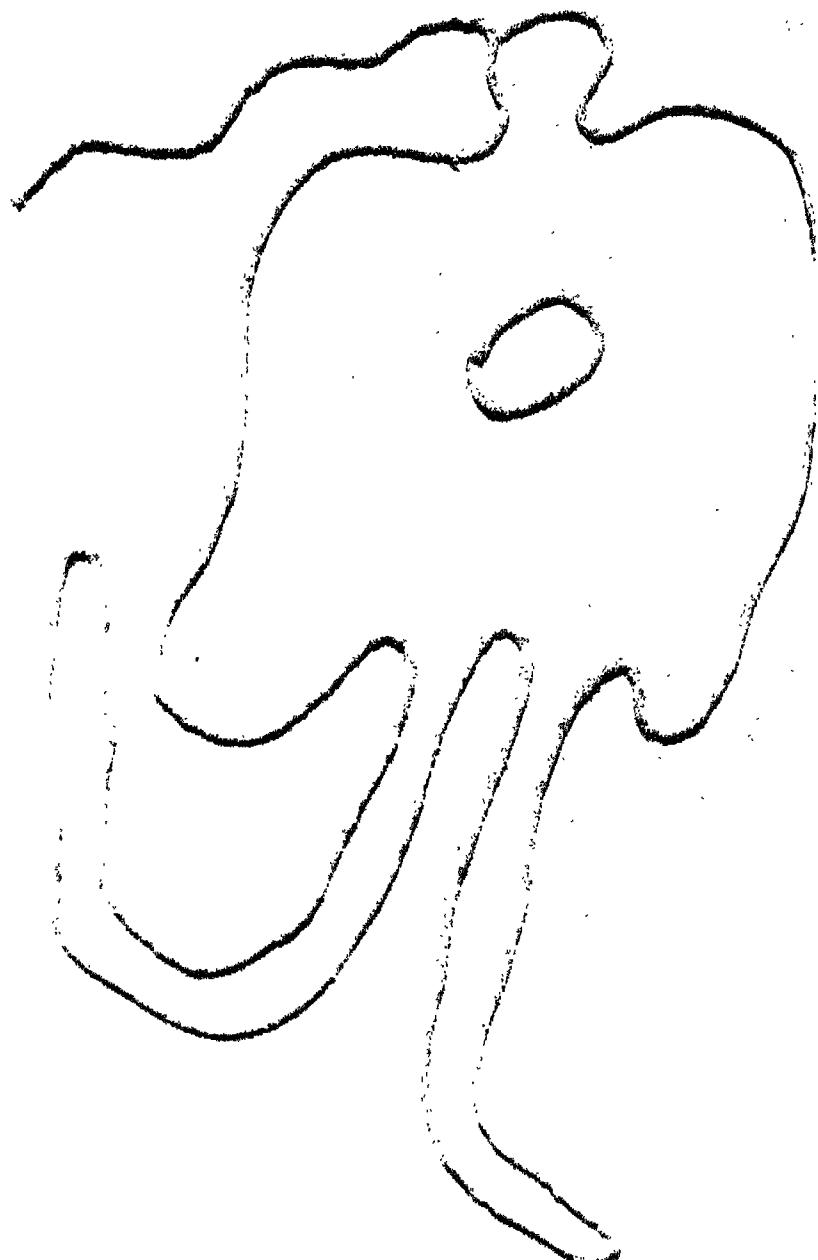
Mr. Gorier attacks the ignorance and hence injustice of those who have slandered Sade, which makes it all the more reprehensible of him that he should in this case be guilty of the same faults. In any case, he should be reminded that M. Maurice Heine, Sade's most faithful modern editor and commentator, for whom he expresses much admiration, is himself a member of the surrealist group, his name appearing among the signatories of the latest surrealist manifesto.

work first published in 1836 under the title of *Gaspar de la Nuit*, was, I believe, the originator of the prose-poem—a form which he used exclusively and that later on was to be greatly developed and made use of by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont (whose *Chants de Maldoror* were written entirely in prose) and many others. Petrus Borel, a poet and novelist considerably influenced by Sade, is best known by his romance *Madame Putiphar*, an offspring of the novels of terror, or *romans noirs*, that were so much in vogue at the beginning of the century. He was known as "the lycanthrope," and the portrait of him that appears in the 1832 edition of his *Rhapsodies* depicts him as a sombre and revolutionary figure clutching a dagger. Gerard de Nerval, who made his appearance a decade or so later, deserves more attention than I can give him here. His work is imbued with a very remarkable fantasy, owing to the fact that he himself was never very far from madness. This spirit of fantasy, of a very high quality—(his "Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour aboli" is one of the most famous examples of "pure" poetry in the French language)—Nerval carried beyond the limits of written poetry into the

realm of real life, wearing extraordinary clothes, leading a lobster about at the end of a blue ribbon, and so on. There is an admirable account of him in Mr. Peter Quennell's *Baudelaire and the Symbolists*.

This brings us to Charles Baudelaire, undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of modern times, whose importance for us in this study lies not so much in his technical perfection, his masterly control of poetic style, as in his moral attitude. Once more I am able to quote from an article by one of the surrealists:

"How was such a man, made as none other to reflect doubt, hatred, scorn, disgust, sorrow, able to manifest his passions to such a degree and to empty the world of its contents so as to accuse all the defeated beauties and smirched truths with it, so placid and so complacent? Why did he set himself the task of fighting with inflexible rigour against sane reality, against that slavish morality than ensures the happiness and peace of supposedly free men? Why did he oppose ready-made good with evil to be done, God with the devil, stupidity with intelligence, the motionless pure sky with clouds? Listen to him saying, and with what desperate violence, that he would be lying did he not declare that his whole self was in the book that he had written. In spite of solitude, in spite of poverty, in spite of illness, in spite of laws he declares it, he struggles on. All the powers of unhappiness are on his side. Perhaps there is some chance of winning? Will black and white triumph over grey and dirt?



Will the avenging hand finish writing on the walls of the immense prison the accursed sentence that would make them crumble away? But the light is fading. The sentence is interminable. Baudelaire can no longer see the words, the precious, mortal words. He is wounded by his weapons. Once more he discovers what his own end must be. Where judges would have been powerless, his illness conquers. Baudelaire is dumb. Outside the walls the night begins to moan."

(Paul Eluard, "The Mirror of Baudelaire,"  
*Minotaure*, No. 1.)

It was Rimbaud who wrote: "Baudelaire is the first seer, the king of poets, a true god. But the surroundings he lived in were too artistic, and his much-vaunted form is paltry. The inventions of the unknown call for new forms." This deficiency of form Rimbaud attempted to make good in his own work. *Les Illuminations* should be recognised as the first flaring-up of that spirit of invention and search for novelty which distinguishes the "modern movement." But it was not only against old literary forms that Rimbaud revolted, it was against old stupidities, conventions, morality—the whole life of the epoch of capitalist prosperity in which he lived. His departure to Abyssinia even, regarded by some as a sign of defeat and submission, was an act of

revolt, in spite of what certain Catholic writers and others, all intent on *whitewashing* this noble rebel, have attempted to read into the absolutely desperate words of *Une Saison en Enfer*. The disgusting attempts to pervert everything that Rimbaud ever wrote, to make of him (as others have tried to make of Baudelaire) a Catholic *manqué*, went so far that in 1927 his memory was honoured, by the mayor and councillors of his home town that he loathed so much, with a bronze statue, brass bands playing and general celebrations<sup>1</sup>. The surrealists did not hesitate on this occasion to publish a manifesto denouncing such amazing hypocrisy.

In a study of the current of thought leading up to the surrealist movement it is difficult to separate the name of Rimbaud from that of Lautréamont, whose *Chants de Maldoror* was published in 1869, just four years before *Une Saison en Enfer* was written. "There are new shivers running through the intellectual atmosphere at this time," wrote Lautréamont. It was true. "*Leaves of Grass* appeared in 1855. Hopkins's poems were written

<sup>1</sup> The monument to Rimbaud was originally put up in 1901, but was destroyed during the War.

between 1862-1889. Lear's *Book of Nonsense* was first published in 1846. Lewis Carroll produced his works between 1870-1880, period also of *Maldoror* and *Une Saison en Enfer . . .*<sup>1</sup>. And did not the first volume of *Capital* appear in 1867?

Of the life of Isidore Ducasse, the self-styled Comte de Lautréamont, almost nothing is known. He is generally believed to have been born in Montevideo, South America, in 1846; to have come to Paris to receive his education and to have died there in 1870. All other details of his life must be matters of pure conjecture; no authentic records are known to exist. In this respect, the collected edition of his works published by "Au Sans Pareil" in 1927 is somewhat misleading; it contains a long preface by Philippe Soupault purporting to be the result of considerable research into contemporary documents and to reveal a great deal about Lautréamont hitherto unknown; most of these "new facts," however, are pure fabrication, as was pointed out in a pamphlet, *Lautréamont Envers et Contre Tout*, published shortly afterwards and signed by Louis Aragon, André Breton and Paul Eluard.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Madge, *New Verso*, No. 14.

Lautréamont published only two works, *Les Chants de Maldoror* and a short book of criticism, *Poésies*. They leave no doubt whatever that he was a man of genius. *Les Chants de Maldoror* are best described as a debauch of the imagination. The extraordinary, the horrible, the grotesque, the absurd are carried by Lautréamont to such extremes as have never been reached before or since. Maldoror, the protagonist, is a modern reincarnation of the Devil on the most colossal scale; the theme of the book is his incessant combat with the Creator, who is presented as an indescribably revolting monster. Maldoror is the pride of intellect, the Creator is blind and bestial stupidity. In spite of the delirious nature of the whole book, however, everything, even in the wildest scenes, is described in a cold, precise, almost scientific prose. One section is devoted to a hymn (in prose) to the glory of geometry and mathematics. It seems evident that *Les Chants* were written more or less automatically, for on almost every page there are to be found the most remarkable spontaneous metaphors and images bearing a striking resemblance to those produced during the early phases of surrealist writing fifty years later.

Lautréamont's only other work, *Poésies*, is of quite another nature and seems to have been written as though in reply to his earlier excesses. Sternly he criticises the Romantics, the "Great Softheads" of his epoch; and brilliantly he epitomises the essentials of a *balanced* conception of poetry. It is only a very short book, but it contains the germs of a great many ideas that have been developed since his death. "His work plays the part of lever in the evolution (of poetry) that is already taking place," says Tristan Tzara in number four of *Le Surrealisme au Service de la Révolution*; "for he demonstrates, far better than Hugo, that by a sort of verbal magic or incantatory verbalism, the reason is capable of transformation and logic of dissolution."

"The attempts of the romantics, of Rimbaud, and the success of Lautréamont were not however realised immediately. There was still no coherent effort towards the irrational, the surreal. There was no communal effort. The too heavy chains with which prejudices and laws weigh down the mind had still to be broken. A few men were little by little accomplishing this task and preparing the way. After Lautréamont, this effort lost its vigour. Rimbaud and Lautréamont were both isolated, to the discredit of their epoch, and their gestures only acquired meaning with time."

(Guy Mangeot: *Histoire du Surrealisme*, 1934.)

Not altogether without importance in the evolution I am attempting to trace is the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, a disinterested experimentalist, the object of whose researches was to restore to words their pristine clarity and evocatory power. This he sought to do by means of typography, ingenious redisposition of syntax, omission of articles and pronouns, suppression of punctuation, and so on. The claim to our attention of his *manner* is undoubtedly far more important than that of his *matter*, which had not much to distinguish it from the stock-in-trade of symbolist poetry, of which his *Après-midi d'un Faune* is a classic example. Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dès* represents the extreme expression of his syntactical experiments, and is necessarily very obscure, if not entirely incomprehensible.

Two other minor nineteenth century French poets who should not be passed over without mention are Germain Nouveau and Charles Cros. These two poets, both of whom were friends of Rimbaud in his turbulent Paris café days, have fallen into a regrettable obscurity, but some of the poems they have left are of such genuine and original beauty

that it is not likely that they will ever be entirely forgotten. Of the life of Cros I know nothing save a few anecdotes connected with Rimbaud, and of Nouveau I know only that he led the life of a tramp and spent his last days as a beggar outside the doors of a church somewhere in the Midi. And of their poems I am hardly qualified to speak, as I am acquainted with only a very few of them. I only know that I shall never forget hearing Paul Eluard read, in his inimitable voice, the poem of Cros' that tells of a tall white wall with a ladder against it, a herring lying on the ground, and one who came with a heavy hammer, a long piece of string and a nail; who mounted the ladder and nailed the string to the top of the wall, tying the herring to the other end; and then climbed down and went far, far away, leaving the herring slowly swaying there ever after. . . .

Then there is J. K. Huysmans, author of that extraordinary and apparently demodé novel, *A Rebours*, to which, unfortunately, we owe most of that literature known in England as "the nineties." But as has been pointed out before, if Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* is a reflection of Huysmans,

it is only a very pale and distorted one. Huysmans should be judged by his own standards and not by those of his imitators. I quote from Havelock Ellis:

"Huysmans, with the intellectual passion of the pioneer in art, deliberate and relentless, has carried both the theory and the practice of decadence in style to the farthest point. In practice he goes beyond Baudelaire, who, however enamoured he may have been of what he called 'the phosphorescence of putrescence,' always retained in his own style much of what is best in the classic manner. Huysmans' vocabulary is vast, his images, whether remote or familiar, always daring—'dragged,' in the words of one critic, 'by the hair or by the feet, down the worm-eaten staircase of terrified Syntax'—but a heart-felt pulse of emotion is restrained beneath the sombre and extravagant magnificence of this style, and imparts at the best that modulated surge of life which only the great masters can control."

It will not be inappropriate to quote here a passage from *A Rebours* describing the work of an artist who clearly foreshadowed the paintings of certain surrealists:

"Des Esseintes had a special weakness for the other frames adorning the room. They were signed: Odilon Redon. They enclosed inconceivable apparitions in their rough, gold-striped pear-tree wood. A head of Merovingian style, resting against a bowl, a bearded man, at once resembling a Buddhist priest and an orator at a public reunion, touching the ball of a gigantic cannon with his fingers; a frightful spider

revealing a human face in its body. The charcoal drawings went even further into dream terrors. Here, an enormous dice in which a sad eye winked; there, dry and arid landscapes, dusty plains, shifting ground, volcanic upheavals catching rebellious clouds, stagnant and livid skies. Sometimes the subjects even seemed to have borrowed from the cacodemons of science, reverting to prehistoric times. A monstrous plant on the rocks, queer blocks everywhere, glacial mud, figures whose simian shapes, heavy jaws, beetling eyebrows, retreating foreheads and flat skulls, recalled the ancestral heads of the first quaternary periods, when inarticulate man still devoured fruits and seeds, and was still contemporaneous with the mammoth, the rhinoceros and the big bear. These designs were beyond anything imaginable; they leaped, for the most part, beyond the limits of painting and introduced a fantasy that was unique, the fantasy of a diseased and delirious mind."

I like to think that were Des Esseintes alive to-day he would have a special weakness for the paintings of Salvador Dali, whose horrors easily surpass those of Redon while at the same time their author manages to exercise a kind of clinical control over his imagination, thus preventing it from dragging him with it into domains from which it would be impossible to return.

\* \* \*

The masterpiece of Alfred Jarry, *L'Ubu Roi*, was

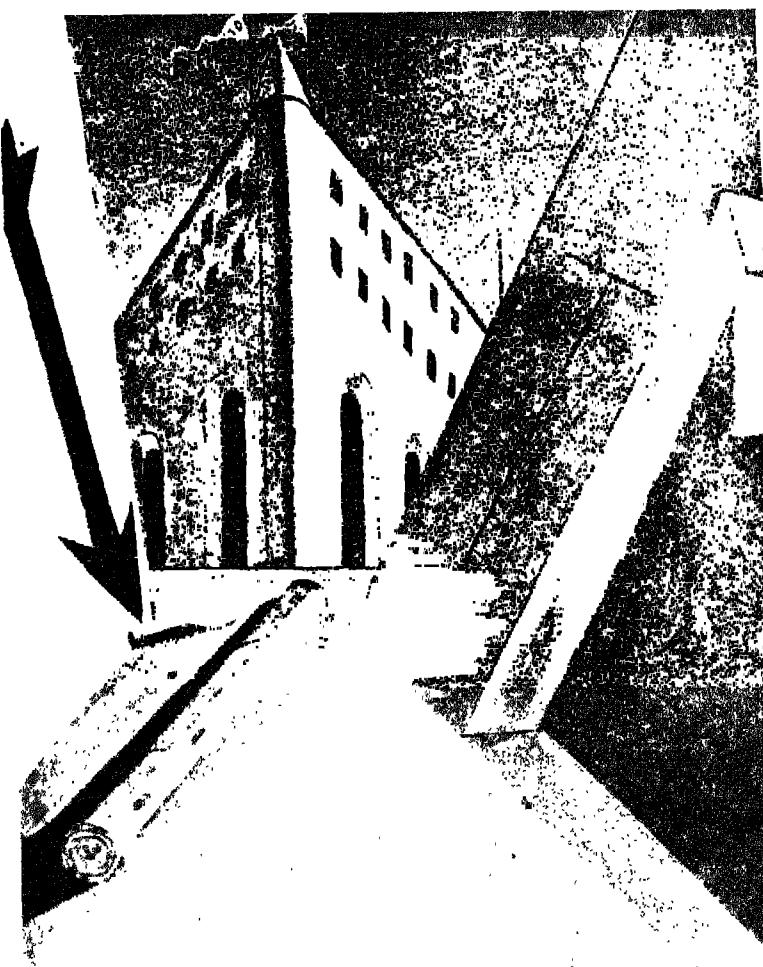
first produced in 1888, when the author was fifteen. This is an almost unequalled example of precosity, for there is nothing in the least innocent or childlike about the brutal satire of *Ubu*. It is difficult enough to give the English reader a very clear idea of the character of this play, with its particularly Gallic humour. Ubu, like the Creator in *Maldoror*, is a monster<sup>1</sup>, representing, under the guise of the most far-fetched cruelty and stupidity, the forces of bourgeois law, order and respectability. Anyone in Ubu's realm whose ideas or behaviour happened to be even slightly beyond the stunted comprehension of the king and his courtiers was immediately hurried off to prison or the scaffold. It is hardly surprising that society was loathe to recognise its apish face in Jarry's mirror, and that the play enjoyed great success as a farcical burlesque, and even to-day can still draw crowded and enthusiastic audiences in France (there was until recently an Alfred Jarry Theatre in Paris), where the public

<sup>1</sup> "If he resembles an animal he has above all a porcine countenance, with a nose like the upper jaw of a crocodile, and the general effect of his cardboard armour is to make him in every way the brother of that most aesthetically horrible of all marine creatures, the *lunule*." (Jarry.)

by this time probably understands full well at whom the fun is being poked but, owing to a curious feature of French psychology, seems rather to enjoy having its face heartily slapped occasionally.

Jarry's humour is not unlike that demonstrated by Wyndham Lewis in *The Wild Body*—a cold cerebral humour at the expense of the stupid and clumsy human machine. The laughter it produces performs the moral function of a purge; while at the same time it is antisocial and subversive. The surrealist sense of humour—at its best, perhaps, in the poems and stories of Benjamin Péret—has undoubtedly developed from that of Jarry, who in his later works, particularly in the novel *Le Surmâle*, and in *Gestes et Opinions du Dr. Faustroll, pata-physicien*, carried this element of humour into the domain of the purely irrational and absurd.

It is interesting to note that while the work of Jarry is not entirely confined to humour, even in the most lyrical of his poems, those contained in *Les Minutes de Sable Memorial*, for example, the humorous element is never far absent. A trace of it is even to be found in the magnificent poem *Le Sablier*, which begins:



THE FETE DAY

Painting by GIORGIO DE CHIRIC

“Suspend ton coeur aux trois piliers,  
Suspend ton coeur les bras liés,  
Suspend ton coeur, ton coeur qui pleure  
Et qui se vide au cours de l’heure  
Dans son reflet sur un marais.  
Prends ton coeur aux piliers de grès.”

In the work of Jarry, more than almost any other writer, is to be seen the subtle interplay of humour and lyricism, never entirely divorced from one another and both proceeding in the beginning, I believe, from a common source.

Humour is also to be found, though under another aspect, in the curious writings of Raymond Roussel, who published his first work, *La Doublure*, a poem, in 1897. The life of this man, who died only in 1933, was quite as extraordinary as his books. The stories about him are innumerable, and out of them a veritable Roussel legend has grown. He was so rich that he could gratify, if he so wished, the least whim of his phenomenally fertile imagination. He went more than once round the world, and travelled round Europe and Asia Minor in the most luxurious motor caravan, fitted with studio, bedroom and bathroom: and yet was later able to boast that he had never used even the least of his

travelling experiences as material for his writings, which consisted entirely of fantasy and invention. His wealth enabled him to put on the Paris stage a series of plays—*Locus Solus*, *Poussière de Soleils*, *L'Etoile au Front*—and to employ the best-known music-hall artists to act the chief parts in them. Every performance created a scandal. The interminable recitals of minutely detailed anecdotes, the violent and insulting speeches, the introduction on the stage of the most far-fetched mechanical contrivances, the long incomprehensible pantomimes of moving statues, floating wreaths and glass flowers bobbing up and down—no audience could be expected to take such things quietly. No doubt he was to some extent engaged in pulling the public's gentle leg; but that does not exclude the possibility that he had a certain genius. There is real pleasure to be found in the pages of *Impressions d'Afrique*, for example. Roussel's Africa, of course, is an entirely imaginary one; he is said to have been inspired to write this book by a little pair of opera-glasses in his possession, one tube of which revealed painted on the lens the bazaars of Cairo, the other, Luxor. Here, as in his other works, are to be found long and

apparently irrelevant anecdotes, descriptions of performances and ceremonies, inventions such as an orchestra of musical sponges, and so on. Nothing has ever rivalled in complexity or novelty the astounding inventions of Roussel: rails made of calves' lights; an immense diamond full of water and containing, among other things, a nude dancer with musical hair, a hairless cat, and a pointed metal horn pierced with holes; an immense glass cage in which historical episodes are enacted; packs of tarot cards containing emerald insects that emit halos capable of passing through flesh; a cock that writes the name of a woman on a sheet of ivory by coughing up blood on to it—all are described with a hairsplitting accuracy that enables us to see them as though they actually existed. They form, as Salvador Dali has said, "a dreamed itinerary of new paranoiac phenomena."

Finally, we come to Guillaume Apollinaire, a man whose energetic enthusiasm was one of the main driving forces behind the beginnings of what is known as "the modern movement," a term that is meaningless enough now but that comprised during the few years before the War, Apollinaire's heyday,

all the new ideas and styles that have revitalised art in our time. He was a first-rate poet, he was the friend of all the new painters experimenting in Paris (and among the first to recognise the genius of men such as Picasso and Braque), he was a collector of negro sculpture at a time when the merits of negro sculpture were entirely unrecognised by collectors, he was editor of a selected edition of Sade, and, above all, he was the inspirer of all the young men about him. All the new movements of his time, cubism, futurism, dadaism, found in him their staunchest champion; and no doubt he would have championed surrealism, even without fully understanding it, had he lived to see it born. One of his last works, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, a play first performed in 1917, the year before his death, was sub-titled: *drame surréaliste*. But another seven years were still to pass before the appearance of the first surrealist manifesto.

The word Dada means *hobby-horse*. It was not chosen for any reason; it simply happened to be the first word to meet the eye upon the page of a dictionary opened at random.

“I affirm that Tristan Tzara discovered the word Dada on the 8th of February, 1916, at 6 o’clock in the evening,” says Hans Arp, one of the first members of the group; “I was there with my twelve children when Tzara pronounced for the first time this word, which aroused a legitimate enthusiasm in all of us. This took place at the Terrace Café in Zurich, and I had a roll of bread up my left nostril. I am persuaded that only imbeciles and Spanish professors can be interested in dates. What interests us is the dada spirit, and we were all dada before Dada began. . . .”

Negativism, revolt, destruction of all values, Dada was a violent protest against art, literature, morals, society. It spat in the eye of the world. Life is a disgusting riddle, but we can ask harder ones, was the dadaist attitude. To many intelligent men at this time, suicide seemed to be the one remaining

solution to the problem of living, and Dada was a spectacular form of suicide, a manifestation of almost lunatic despair.

Dada was the concrete expression of an almost universal state of mind, a state of mind that had existed even before the outbreak of the War. Marcel Duchamp's masterpiece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Own Bachelors*, was begun in 1911, for instance. (This profoundly enigmatic work, for which hundreds of notes and rough sketches were made, consists of a painting on glass of an enormous and incomprehensible machine.) Marcel Duchamp, always remaining aloof and refusing to enter into any organised activity, either dadaist or surrealist, exercised a deeper influence over the Dada movement than almost anyone.

Another typical example of this state of mind was Jacques Vaché, who committed suicide in 1918. A sophisticated anarchist, a type much resembling André Gide's Lafcadio, Vaché was Dada in his life rather than in anything he produced, for he was neither an artist nor a writer. In 1916 he came in contact with André Breton in a hospital at Nantes, and he seems to have had at that time a considerable

influence over the future leader of the surrealist movement, who later edited his remarkable and very moving letters from the front.

The Dada spirit was something shared by a number of extreme individualists of various nationalities, all of whom were in revolt against the whole of the epoch in which they lived. There is hardly a better expression of it than these words of Ribemont-Dessaignes: "What is beautiful? What is ugly? What is great, strong, weak? What is Carpentier, Renan, Foch? Don't know. What am I? Don't know. Don't know, don't know, don't know."

\* \* \*

Zurich, during the War, was full of refugees from Central Europe. There were German pacifists, Hungarians, Roumanians, Russian revolutionaries. Lenin himself was there, and could be seen playing draughts in the cafés. The general atmosphere was certainly political, but there were also a few writers and artists, cubists, futurists and expressionists, among the emigrés. Towards the end of 1915 a young Roumanian, distinguished so far by nothing but the fact that he had studied philosophy, arrived in their midst. This was Tristan Tzara, the future

author of the first Dada manifesto and virtual director of the entire movement. Very soon after he was joined by an Alsatian poet and artist, Hans Arp, who came from Paris, where he had been working, not wishing to join in the War on either the French or the German side. These two men very soon became friends and about the same time they got to know a young German poet, Hugo Ball, and another Roumanian, Marcel Janko. At the beginning of the following year another German poet, Richard Huelsenbeck, arrived in Zurich, and in February, as has already been described, the Dada movement began.

Hugo Ball opened the *Cabaret Voltaire*, a sort of café where pictures were exhibited, poems read and concerts given by a balalaika orchestra. On the 30th of March a "magnificent concert of negro music" was given there, organised by Tzara, and Tzara, Huelsenbeck and Janko gave a simultaneous reading of their poems. Neither music nor poems showed the least trace of negro influence, of course; that was simply a current Dada expression. The poems that Tzara was writing at that time, typical Dada poems, were like this:

“in your inside there are smoking lamps  
the swamp of blue honey  
cat crouched in the gold of a flemish inn  
boom boom  
lots of sand yellow bicyclist  
chateauneuf des papes  
manhattan there are tubs of excrement before you  
mbaze mbaze bazebaze mleganga garoo  
you turn round rapidly inside me  
kangaroos in the boat’s entrails. . . .”

In June, 1916, appeared the first number of a review called *Cabaret Voltaire*. It published poems by Tzara, Huelsenbeck, Ball, Emmy Hennings (Ball’s wife), Janko and others, including Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars and Marinetti.

Then the *Cabaret Voltaire* had to close down, to be replaced shortly afterwards by a Dada Gallery, where exhibitions of the work of such painters as Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Arp, Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico, Modigliani and Prampolini were given, and where, on the 14th of July, Tzara read his first Dada manifesto, attacking all values and ridiculing art, science, philosophy and psychology. Confusion reigned.

A year later appeared a second review, this time entitled *Dada I, collection of art and literature*.

While Dada was being born in Zurich, much the same thing was happening in New York. Marcel Duchamp was there at that time, teaching French; Francis Picabia was there, and so was Man Ray. Duchamp brought out two numbers of reviews, one called *Wrong-Wrong*, and the other *The Blind Man*. Picabia contributed to a review entitled *Camera-Work*, which was edited by Alfred Stieglitz, the owner of the Stieglitz Gallery. It was the street number of this gallery which gave Picabia the title of the review he founded a little later on, 291.

Such was Marcel Duchamp's disgust for "art" that he invented a new form of expression, which he called *Ready-Made*. A Ready-Made was any manufactured object that the artist liked to choose. For instance, in 1917 he sent in to the New York *Salon des Indépendants* a simple marble lavatory-bowl, which he entitled *Fountain*, signing it *R. Mutt*. (Needless to say, it was rejected.) And then again, he once took a little laundry-calendar picture, a mediocre little picture representing a woodland glen, painted in a couple of tiny bottles hanging like electric-light bulbs from the branches of two trees, one bottle red, the other green, and called it *Phar-*

macie. Certainly Duchamp is one of the most extraordinary men alive. He is a champion chess-player, among other things; and it is said that in his apartment he has had a special door built, with two doorways, so that it is always both open *and* shut<sup>1</sup>.

Francis Picabia, a somewhat less interesting person than Duchamp, was a great asset to the Dada movement on account of his wealth of humour—a bitter and obscure sort of humour, to be sure, but nevertheless *humour*—and his indefatigable zest for bringing out reviews. In January, 1917, he left New York for Barcelona, and there he brought out the first number of *391*, twelve numbers of *291* having already appeared. From Barcelona he went to Geneva, where he brought out a few more numbers of his review (which, for the most part, he wrote and illustrated himself) and also one or two small books of poems and drawings. And then, at last, he went on to Zurich, met Tzara and his friends and became

<sup>1</sup> "I have in mind the occasion when Marcel Duchamp got hold of some friends to show them a cage which seemed to have no birds in it but to be half-full of lumps of sugar. He asked them to lift the cage and they were surprised at its heaviness. What they had taken for lumps of sugar were really small lumps of marble which at great expense Duchamp had had sawn up specially for the purpose."

(André Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*.)

merged into the Dada movement proper. He was known to the others as the Anti-painter, just as Tzara was known as the Anti-philosopher. He soon brought out the eighth number of *391* (February, 1919), a completely Dada number this time, containing poems and prose by Picabia and Tzara, a manifesto by Gabrielle Buffet, Picabia's wife, and illustrations by Arp and Alice Bailly. On the cover was printed the following terse little verse by Picabia:

"I have a horror of the painting  
of Cézanne  
it bores me stiff."

Dada was in full swing in Zurich during 1919. Three numbers of the review *Dada* had already appeared, with contributions from Paris, where the movement was already growing. Tzara had published his *25 Poems*, illustrated with woodcuts by Arp. There were exhibitions, there were *soirées*. In April a particularly scandalous public *soirée* took place, during which five people dressed in stove-pipes, which concealed their entire bodies, performed a dance entitled *Noir Cacadou*; a poet called Serner, it having been announced that he was going

to give a reading of his works, came on to the platform and laid a bunch of flowers at the feet of a dummy figure; then Tzara got up to read a Dada proclamation, but by this time the whole hall was in such an uproar that no one could hear a word.

In May, *Dada 4-5* appeared, under the title of *Dada Anthology*, containing work by almost all the dadaists then known. And at the end of the year, Tzara left Zurich for Paris.

\* \* \*

Before going on to describe the great days of Dada in Paris, 1920-21, I must mention the activities of Dada in Germany.

In Berlin a Dada group was founded by Richard Huelsenbeck, who returned there from Zurich in 1917. He published three reviews: *Club Dada*, *Der Dada*, and *Almanach Dada*. Among the contributors was George Grosz, whose pictures—violent, vitriolic attacks on modern society—are well known everywhere to-day. Francis Picabia and the Paris dadaists also appeared in these reviews. In 1920 Huelsenbeck organised an enormous Dada show at Berlin, comprising one hundred and seventy-four exhibits.

In Hanover, Kurt Schwitters, a young poet and



artist, founded a kind of Dadaism to which he gave the name of *Merz*.

But by far the most sensational of the German dadaist groups was that of Cologne, where Max Ernst, the painter, and Baargeld, Communist poet and artist, founded *Der Ventilator*, a Dada publication with strong social (or rather, anti-social) tendencies. In 1919 Ernst published an album of extraordinary drawings, entitled *Fiat Modes*, and in 1920, in collaboration with Hans Arp, his first collection of *collages*—(pictures cut from magazines, newspapers, etc., and stuck together in fantastic combinations)—entitled *Fatagaga*, short for “Fabrication of guaranteed gasometric pictures.” In 1920, also, was held the Cologne dadaists’ exhibition, which created such a scandal that it had to be closed down by the police. In order to enter the gallery one had to pass through a public lavatory. Inside, the public was provided with hatchets with which, if they wanted to, they could attack the objects and paintings exhibited. At the end of the gallery a young girl, dressed in white for her first communion, stood reciting obscene poems. Destruction and sacrilege, not at all uncommon features of the feverish

atmosphere of Germany immediately after the War.

In 1922, Max Ernst left Cologne for Paris, where he has remained ever since.

\* \* \*

It is not surprising that Tristan Tzara found Paris, in 1920, the perfect headquarters for the Dada movement. It was there that all the most advanced and revolutionary forms of writings and painting were fermenting in one great melting-pot. Of all the movements that came out of it, surrealism is the only one still alive to-day, and that is because it is fundamentally a revolution of ideas and not of the forms expressing them.

Three reviews of distinctly Dada tendency had already appeared in Paris. The first, founded by Pierre-Albert Birot in January, 1916, was called *Sic*, with the sub-title: SOUNDS—IDEAS—COLOURS—FORMS. This was followed in 1917 by *Nord-Sud*, in which appeared André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon, future surrealists, as well as Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy (the editor), Max Jacob and others, writers more affiliated with cubism. The third review to appear was *Littérature*

(which really meant Anti-literature), directed by Breton, Soupault and Aragon, and introducing for the first time the work of Paul Eluard. All these young men were in a very troubled and chaotic state of mind. They wanted to break everything down in order to liberate—what? They did not know as yet. When, in 1917, Guillaume Apollinaire showed him for the first time the publications of the Zurich dadaists, it seemed to Breton that Dada was what he was out for. For some time he and his friends were enthusiastic supporters of the movement, but in the end they were to find it unsatisfying. Complete anarchy, such as Dada represented, ultimately amounts to the most restricting kind of tyranny.

Tzara was received with great enthusiasm by the *Littérature* group, and shortly after his arrival a Dada *matinée* was organised at a hall called the *Palais des Fêtes*. To open the performance, poems were read. Jean Cocteau read a few poems by Max Jacob, though neither of them were really dadaists. The public, feeling sure that there was something outrageously "modern" but "clever," you know, all the same, was inclined to be admiring. Then

Breton brought on to the platform a blackboard on which Picabia had drawn some kind of machine, and immediately proceeded to rub the picture off with a cloth. He then produced a picture by Marcel Duchamp, which was nothing more or less than a large printed reproduction of the Mona Lisa with a handsome pair of moustaches painted on to her face and bearing underneath the inscription: LHOOQ (phonetic, perhaps, for "Look!", since Duchamp knew English quite well). By this time the public was beginning to get rather annoyed, and when Tzara, having announced a Dada manifesto, began to read a newspaper article to the accompaniment of the ringing of electric bells, the performance came to end amidst general uproar and scandal.

At this time, most of the "advanced" painters in Paris, cubists and so on, belonged to a group known as the *Section d'Or*. They all found the phenomenon of Dada extremely disturbing. What would be the good of any kind of painting, once the Dada spirit got a wide hold? Dada scoffed at all forms of seriousness, but particularly at serious art. So the *Section d'Or* called a meeting on the 25th of February, 1920, at that famous café *La Closerie de*

*Lilas*, with the object of “expelling” the dadaists. There was a great scene, as can well be imagined, for the dadaists themselves were all present, and were not going to allow themselves to be “expelled” by anybody without a good deal of protest. In a very short time the meeting degenerated into a shouting match; the tumult became so great that the *patron* of the café ordered the lights to be turned out, which made no difference, for the expulsion continued in the darkness. Leopold Survage climbed on to a chair and shouted: “Ex-pelled! You are all ex-pelled!” Not that the dadaists cared in the least whether they were or not.

Meanwhile, Dada became the fashionable topic of the day. The public wanted to understand. They wanted Dada explained to them. Was it a new system of ideas, a new form of expression? Was Dada serious, or was it simply a large-scale leg-pull? —But they were all on the wrong track. Dada expressed nothing but revolt: it was a delirium, the public could never understand it unless they felt the same way themselves.

Dadaist books, reviews, periodicals, pamphlets continued to appear. Dadaist *soirées* were given at

the *Indépendants* and the *Université Populaire*. On the 26th of May, 1920, a *Dada Festival* was held at the Salle Gaveau, one of Paris's most famous concert-halls.

The *Dada Festival* may very well be regarded as the climax of the whole movement. Never was any audience presented with such a manifestation of out-and-out nihilism; certainly not in surroundings such as the rather prim Salle Gaveau, long accustomed to Bach concerts and organ recitals. The indignation of the public rose to more sublime heights than ever before. It is surprising that the police were not called in to intervene. On occasions such as these, of course, the behaviour of the audience was all part of Dada.

“Personal appearance of Charlie Chaplin,” the advertisements announced. On the programme was printed the note: “The dadaists will pull their hair out in public.” But somehow or other neither of these parts of the performance took place. The following numbers were, however, presented:

*The Sex of Dada.*

*Boxing Without Tears*, by Paul Derméc.

*Bold Behaviour*, by Paul Eluard.

*The Interloping Navel*, music by G. Ribemont-Dessaignes.  
*Presbyterian Festival Manifesto*, by Francis Picabia.  
*The International Crook*, by André Breton.  
*The Second Adventure of Monsieur Aa, the Anti-pyrine*,  
by Tristan Tzara.  
*You will forget me*, Sketch, by André Breton and Philippe  
Soupault.  
*The American Nurse*, music by Francis Picabia.  
*Frontier Dance*, by G. Ribemont-Dessaignes.  
*System DD*, by Louis Aragon.  
*Symphonic Vaseline*, by Tristan Tzara, played by 20 people.  
*The Celebrated Illusionist*, by Philippe Soupault.

As at the performance given at the *Indépendants*, the Manifesto was simply an excuse to hurl insults and abuse at the audience, who were not slow, this time, to respond. During one of the intervals a party of young people went out to a nearby butcher's shop and came back armed with pieces of raw meat, which they did not hesitate to fling on to the stage as soon as the performance was resumed. Tomatoes, also, flew through the air, squashing against the gilded columns of the hall and splashing everybody, including the owner of the building, Madame Gaveau, who was sitting, furious, in a box. The dadaists on the platform were delighted and flung the missiles back at the audience. The Festival became a battle, and the Press decided, afterwards,

that Dada was sacrilegious, subversive and altogether outrageous, which was precisely what it was intended to be.

\* \* \*

It would be impossible to summarise here all the more or less hectic antics of the dada reviews. There were so many of them; they sprang up in a night, lasted for two or three numbers and then gave place to others. The only reviews to have appeared fairly regularly seem to have been Breton's *Littérature*, Picabia's *391*, Eluard's *Proverbe* (six issues) and Tzara's various publications. Of the innumerable contributions to these papers one might cite as being typically Dada: Picabia's ink-blot entitled *La Sainte Vierge*; Aragon's poem *Suicide*, consisting of the letters of the alphabet; Tzara's bus-tickets (stuck to the page, a different one for every copy) entitled *Douleur en cage dada à la nage*; the photograph of a gollywog entitled *Natures Mortes, Portrait de Cézanne, Portrait de Rembrandt, Portrait de Renoir*; and Breton's poem consisting of an extract from the telephone directory. A very comprehensive survey of the whole of Dada by Georges Hugnet has been published serially in *Cahiers d'Art*.

One can well imagine the Paris background to all this, the first feverish outbreak of post-war irresponsibility, a great deal of money flowing in all directions, Americans arriving in hordes, endless talking and drinking in every café from Montmartre to Montparnasse. The favourite café of the dadaists was a bar called Certa in the Passage de l'Opéra, described by Aragon in his *Paysan de Paris*: "Here the word dada is understood rather differently than elsewhere, and with more simplicity. It means neither anarchy nor anti-art nor any of the things that made the journalists so timid that they preferred to call this *movement* by the name of *hobby-horse* (*Cheval d'enfant*). To be dada is no dishonour, it means simply a group of habitués, rather noisy young people sometimes, perhaps, but *sympathiques* nevertheless. One says: a dada, as one says: the fair-haired gentleman. One distinction is the same as another. And dada is even so well thought of in these parts that they have named a cocktail dada."

But these idyllic days were not to last. Towards the middle of 1921 a certain atmosphere of discontent and quarrelsome ness was beginning to make itself felt. It began with an affair called *La Mise en*

*accusation et jugement de M. Maurice Barrès par DADA*, held on the 13th of May in the hall of the Sociétés Savantes, shortly after which Francis Picabia wrote a series of articles disowning Dada in the popular press. André Breton then announced that his connection with the Dada movement was over. "The only way for Dada to continue," he said, "is for it to cease to exist." Tzara, on the other hand, had no intention of bringing the movement he had founded to an end. Some dadaists took Breton's part, others remained faithful to Tzara. Breton conceived the idea of a Congress of Paris for the determination of the modern spirit, and this caused further broils.

In April, 1922, a series of Dada tours of Paris was announced. Only one took place, a visit to the church of St. Julian le Pauvre. "The dadaists passing through Paris," says the handbill, "wishing to remedy the incompetence of guides and suspect cicerones, have decided to undertake a series of visits to chosen places, particularly those that have really no reason to exist." The announcement also tells us: "Wash your breasts as you wash your gloves"; "Property is the Luxury of the Poor, Be

Dirty"; and adds: "The piano has very kindly been placed at our disposal by the firm of Gavault." The name of Benjamin Péret, who had then just come to Paris and was having some success with his *Passager du Transatlantique*, is among those of the dadaist guides.

In June, a large international Dada exhibition (the last) was held at the Galerie Montaigne. During the exhibition the Italian futurists had a matinée at a certain Paris theatre, and the dadaists attended the performance to manifest their displeasure and scorn; a riot ensued. The owner of the Galerie Montaigne happened to be also the owner of the theatre: he turned the dadaists out of the gallery and closed down the exhibition. A general reunion at the Closerie de Lilas which followed this incident, consummated the rupture and final ruin of Dada.

Tzara, however, rather foolishly determined to keep the flag flying and published shortly afterwards a bulletin entitled *The Bearded Heart*, to which Picabia replied with another, entitled *The Pineapple*. In a last desperate attempt to prevent Dada from dying, Tzara then put on a play, also entitled *The Bearded Heart*. A protest meeting, led by Breton,

arrived at the theatre for the first performance. The incident that followed is recounted by Breton in the first chapter of *Nadja*:

"M. Tristan Tzara would doubtless prefer that no one knew how on the evening of the *Cœur à Barbe* in Paris he 'gave' us, Eluard and me, over to the police, since a spontaneous gesture of that kind is so profoundly significant, and since in the light of this, which surely will be that of history, *25 Poèmes* (the title of one of his books) becomes *25 Lucubrations of a Police-Agent*."

Dada was dead.

## THE PERIOD OF SLEEPING-FITS

### CHAPTER THREE

Already, in the midst of the tumult of Dada, the seeds of surrealism were growing. As we have seen, they were perhaps the least Dada elements of the movement (which wasn't a movement), the non-conforming dadaists, who became surrealists. So I think we can say that the development from dadaism to surrealism was *dialectical*. Dada: negation. Surrealism: negation of negation; a new affirmation, that is. ("A new declaration of the rights of man must be made," says the cover of the first number of *The Surrealist Revolution*, published in 1924.)

The period that marks the transition from dadaism to surrealism (roughly from 1920 to 1923) is often referred to as "la période des sommeils." The word *surrealism* had then already been current for some time; it was invented by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1919, as has been recounted in the first chapter.

In 1921 was published the first collection of authentically surrealist texts, *The Magnetic Fields*, written by André Breton and Philippe Soupault in collaboration. André Breton has himself described,

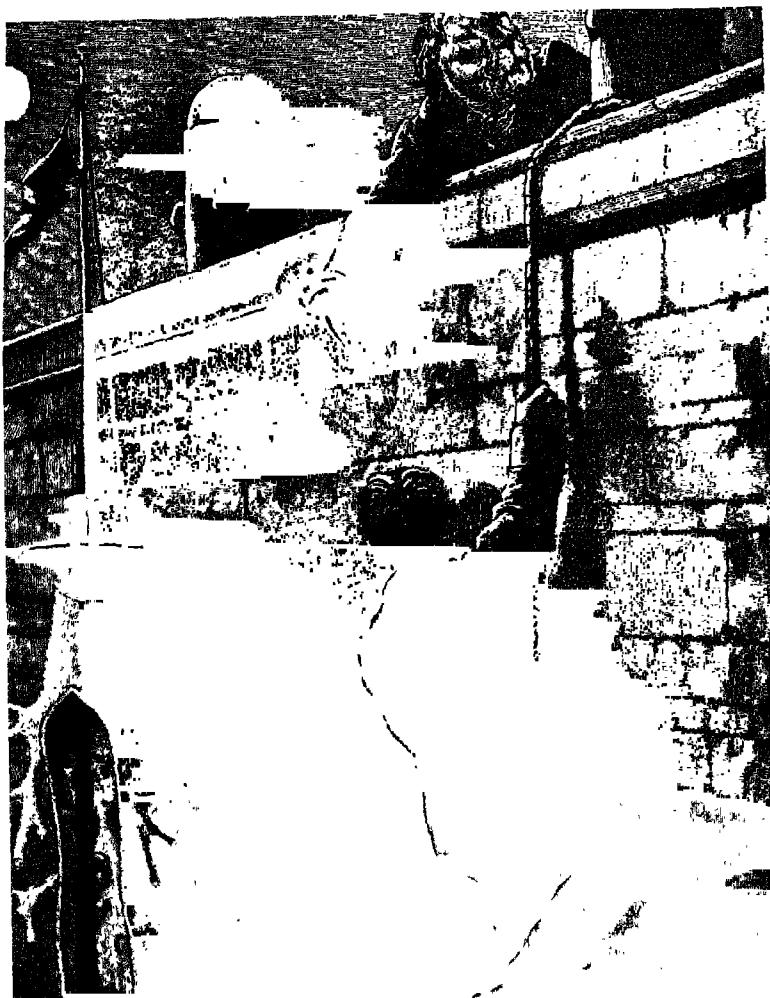
in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, how this first attempt at "pure psychic automatism" came to be made.

"Preoccupied as I still was at that time with Freud," he says, "and familiar with his methods of investigation which I had practised occasionally upon the sick during the War" (Breton was originally intended to be a psychiatrist) "I resolved to obtain from myself what one seeks to obtain from patients, namely a monologue poured out as rapidly as possible, over which the subject's critical faculty has no control—the subject himself throwing reticence to the winds—and which as much as possible represents *spoken thought*. It seemed and still seems to me that the speed of thought is no greater than that of words, and hence does not exceed the flow of either tongue or pen. It was in such circumstances that, together with Philippe Soupault, whom I had told about my first ideas on the subject, I began to cover sheets of paper with writing, feeling a praiseworthy contempt for whatever the literary result might be. Ease of achievement brought about the rest. By the end of the first day of the experiment we were able to read to one another about fifty pages obtained in this manner and to compare the results we had achieved. The likeness was on the whole striking. There were similar faults of construction, the same hesitant manner and also, in both cases, an illusion of extraordinary verve, much emotion, a considerable assortment of images of a quality such as we should never have been able to obtain in the normal way of writing, a very special sense of the picturesque, and, here and there, a few pieces of out and out

buffoonery. The only differences which our two texts presented appeared to me to be due essentially to our respective temperaments, Soupault's being less static than mine, and, if he will allow me to make this slight criticism, to his having scattered about at the top of certain pages—doubtlessly in a spirit of mystification—various words under the guise of titles. I must give him credit, on the other hand, for having always forcibly opposed the least correction of any passage that did not seem to me to be quite the thing. In that he was most certainly right."

From this experiment to a clear definition of surrealism it was not far. In an article entitled *Enter the Mediums*, Breton tells the story of an experience that cropped up on the way and that was undoubtedly of the greatest value to all concerned. This article, published first in *Littérature* (No. 6, second series, November, 1922)<sup>1</sup>, describes first of all how *The Magnetic Fields* came to be written and the interest that Breton and his friends had taken, during three years or more, in automatic writing and dreams. The word *surrealism* is for the first time defined. "This word, which we have not invented, and which we could so easily have left in the vaguest of critical vocabularies, is employed by us with a

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted later in *Les Pas Perdus*, N.R.F., 1924.



---

LE LION DE BELFORT (COLLAGE). MAX ERNST (1934)

precise meaning. We have agreed to refer by it to a certain psychic automatism, which more or less corresponds to the dream-state, a state of which it is by this time very difficult to fix the limits." And here is the second half of the article in full:

"A fortnight ago, on his return from holiday, René Crevel told us of the beginning of a 'spiritualist' initiation that he had undergone at the hands of a certain Madame D. . . . This person, having distinguished particular mediumistic qualities in him, had instructed him in the means of developing them, and so it was, he told us, that under the conditions requisite for these kind of phenomena (darkness and silence in the room, 'chain' of hands about the table) he was enabled to fall rapidly asleep and to pour out words organised into a more or less coherent speech, to which only the awakening put an end. Needless to say that at no time, since the day when we consented to assist in these experiments, have we adopted the spiritualist point of view. As far as I am concerned I formally refuse to admit that any communication whatsoever exists between the living and the dead.

"On Monday, September 25th, at nine o'clock in the evening, in the presence of Desnos, Morise and myself, Crevel went into a hypnotic sleep and pronounced a sort of counsel's speech for the defence, which was not noted down. (Declamatory diction, interrupted by sighs, sometimes falling into singing, insistence on certain words, rapid passing over of others, indefinite prolongment of some of the closing phrases, dramatic ending—all in question of a

woman accused of killing her husband and whose guilt is contested by the fact that she acted at the request of the latter.) On waking, Crevel had no recollection of his recital. In the following experiment, undertaken in the same conditions, he hardly took part at all. No immediate result. At the end of a quarter of an hour Desnos—who thought himself most unsuited to such manifestations, strengthened as he was in this opinion by the fact that a few days earlier, in my company, he had brought to a standstill the performance of two public magnetisers, MM. Donato and Benevol—let fall his head on to his arms and began to scrape the table convulsively. He woke up of his own accord a few moments later, persuaded that he had not been behaving differently from the rest of us. In order to convince him that he was mistaken we had to notify him separately and in writing of what had taken place.

"Crevel having told us that the action of scraping the table might signify a desire to write, it so happened that on the next occasion a pencil was placed in Desnos' hand and a sheet of paper in front of him. In this way, two days later and in similar circumstances, we saw him beneath our very eyes writing, without moving his head, the words: July 14-14 July, in addition to plus signs or crosses. It was then that we took to asking him questions:

*What do you see?*

*Death.*

He draws a hanged woman at the edge of a road.

Writes: *near the fern are going two* (the rest is lost upon the table).

At this moment I place my hand on his left hand.

Q—*Desnos, this is Breton. Tell us what you see in store for him.*

A—*The equator* (he draws a circle and a horizontal diameter).

Q—*Should Breton make a journey?*

A—*Yes.*

Q—*Will it be a business journey?*

A—(He signifies no with his hand. Writes): *Nazimova.*

Q—*Will his wife accompany him on this journey?*

A—? ? ?

Q—*Will he go to look for Nazimova?*

A—*No* (underlined).

Q—*Will he be with Nazimova?*

A—?

Q—*What else do you know about Breton? Speak.*

A—*The boat and the snow—there is also the pretty telegraphic tower—on the pretty tower there is a young* (illegible). I take my hand away. Eluard's replaces it.

Q—*This is Eluard.*

A—*Yes* (drawing).

Q—*What do you know about him?*

A—*Chirico.*

Q—*Is he going to meet Chirico soon?*

A—*The marvellous one with eyes soft as a young baby.*

Q—*What do you see about Eluard?*

A—*He is blue.*

Q—*Why is he blue?*

A—*Because the sky nestles in* (an unfinished, illegible word, the whole sentence is furiously crossed out).

Péret's hand replaces Eluard's.

Q—*What do you know about Péret?*

A—*He will die in a railway-carriage full of people.*

Q—*Does that mean that he will be assassinated?*

A—*Yes.*

Q—*By whom?*

A—*(He draws a train with a man falling out of the carriage window) By an animal.*

Q—*By what animal?*

A—*A blue ribbon, my sweet vagabond.*

Long silence, then: *Speak of her no more, she is going to be born in a few minutes.*

Ernst's hand replaces Péret's.

Q—*It is Ernst who gives you his hand. You know him?*

A—*Who?*

Q—*Max Ernst.*

A—*Yes.*

Q—*Will he live long?*

A—*Fifty-one years.*

Q—*What will he do?*

A—*He will play with the madmen.*

Q—*Will he be happy with these madmen?*

A—*Ask this blue woman.*

Q—*Who is this blue woman?*

A—*THE.*

Q—*What? The?*

A—*Tower.*

“Desnos' sleep came to an end. He woke up with a start preceded by violent gestures.

“It should be remarked that on the same day, before Desnos' performance, Crevel had passed into a state similar

to that of the Monday (another crime story, this time more obscure: *The woman will be naked and it will be the oldest man who will hold the axe*).

“During a third attempt made by Eluard, Ernst, Morise, Péret, a young girl who accompanied the latter, Mlle Renée, and myself, Mlle Renée was the first to fall asleep. She soon appeared to be seized by a great agitation and jerked out breathless sentences: *The gulf . . . my father's colourless sweat is drowning me*. (Repetitions. Signs of fright.)

“A final attempt gave place at the end of a few minutes to a sudden and very prolonged explosion of laughter from Péret. Was he asleep? It was only with difficulty that we could get any words out of him at all.

*What do you see?*

*Water.*

*What colour is the water?*

Same reply. Tone of conviction.

“He rose precipitantly without being asked to, threw himself face down upon the table and pretended to be swimming.

“It would be boring to insist longer upon the character of each phenomenon and upon the circumstances in which we saw it produced: Eluard, Ernst, Morise and myself who, in spite of our willingness, did not fall asleep.”

\* \* \*

Surrealism began in 1922 (approximately); from that date until the publication of André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924 the movement was being determined, clarified, redetermined and discussed. The publications of this period include

several numbers of the revue *Littérature*, of which Breton was the editor and which was contributed to by Louis Aragon, Robert Desnos, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Benjamin Péret, Francis Picabia (who was shortly to sever connections with Breton and his friends), Roger Vitrac and one or two others; a collection of poems by Breton, *Clair de Terre*; *Les Aventures de Télémaque* by Louis Aragon; *Au 125 Boulevard Saint-Germain* by Benjamin Péret (subsequently published in translation in the surrealist number of *This Quarter*, 1932, and a typical example of Péret's wildly fantastic humour); and two books produced by Paul Eluard and Max Ernst in collaboration: *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs des Immortels*. These two latter works, both published in 1922, must have had a fairly strong influence over the subsequent development of surrealism; apart from *The Magnetic Fields*, they were the first purely surrealist books to be published. Eluard had already published three small collections of poems, slight but nevertheless extremely individual and "pure." Ernst had just arrived in Paris from Cologne and was arousing much enthusiasm with his paintings and "collages." *Les Malheurs des Immortels* is

an album of fantastic pictures with descriptive comments in prose; *Répétitions* is a collection of poems illustrated by "collages." The illustrations, formed of inconsequent fragments cut from Victorian magazines, treatises on anatomy, botany, mechanics, etc., give a most vivid impression of reality. An eye appears as a wooden ball threaded on to a piece of string; in a stable full of horses a queer automatic machine like an armchair is whitewashing the wall; in front of a pile of wooden geometrical figures from a drawing-class stands a mediæval warrior to whom a mysterious hand is offering a snake with a head like a razor-blade, and so on.

Here is a translation of a poem by Paul Eluard from *Répétitions*:

#### THE SHEEP

Close your eyes black face  
Close the gardens of the street  
Intelligence and hardness  
Ennui and tranquillity  
These sad evenings at every moment  
The glass and the glass door  
Comforting and sensible  
And light, the fruit-tree  
The flowering tree the fruit-tree  
Fly away.

In the early part of 1924 appeared André Breton's *Les Pas Perdus*, a collection of essays and articles reprinted from various reviews, which show very clearly the direction of Breton's thought during the period we have been discussing. This was his first book of prose; we find in it all those qualities—clarity, precision, courage, enthusiasm, brilliance of style—which have made him one of the most significant thinkers and writers in contemporary European literature.

In the autumn of 1924 appeared the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and in December the first number of *The Surrealist Revolution*.

If to-day the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* seems to present an in some respects inadequate definition of the aims and methods of the movement, there are nevertheless a number of statements in it that continue to hold good for anything that can properly be called surrealist. Because it is not a dogma, because its principles have always demanded the maximum amount of freedom in every field, surrealism has been able to develop to the extent that its external features as they present themselves to-day are undeniably different from those of over a decade ago, even though its foremost aims have remained unchanged.

It is not in the least surprising that Breton's manifesto should have aroused a considerable sensation. A great deal of animosity and blind opposition, also. André Breton is a man of such strong will, of such steadfast adherence to his beliefs, that he is bound always to have more enemies than friends; many a one-time surrealist, unable to maintain the standards of disinterestedness and non-conformity that surrealism demands, has turned upon him with

violence and abuse. He has been accused, among other things, of tyrannical authoritativeness, attempted dictatorship, etc. This may or may not to some extent be true; but one thing is certain: that except for André Breton the surrealist movement could never have existed, for it is as difficult to imagine it without him as it is to imagine psycho-analysis without Freud.

Of all the names cited in the first manifesto as having "made the act of Absolute Surrealism," only three remain to-day. On the other hand, surrealism in France, in 1935, numbers about thirty adherents. For if surrealism itself follows a certain logical course of development, most of the surrealists do not. That is to say that there have been many men, writers and painters, such as Aragon, Desnos, Gerard, Morise, Naville, Soupault, for whom surrealism has been but a moment in their careers, after which they have passed on, by process of reaction, to journalism, "socialist realism," pseudo-classicism, and so on. Even to those unsympathetic to surrealism, such conduct must appear as a sign of fundamental weakness of character. One could fill the rest of this book with accounts of the

personal quarrels among the surrealists occasioned by such cases of weakness and reaction, but not wishing to do that let us return to a consideration of the first Manifesto.

Man's imagination should be free, yet everywhere it is in chains, is the theme of the opening pages. Chains of preconception, be it understood. "To reduce the imagination to slavery," says the author, "even when that slavery goes by the gross name of happiness, is to strip one's self of every remnant of the supreme justice that is to be found at the bottom of each one of us." He goes on to discuss the advantages of madness, a form of freedom that is also, unfortunately, a tyranny, because one cannot control it at will. He then opens his famous attack on rationalism:

"We still live under the reign of logic; that, as you will well understand, is what I want to come to. But the methods of logic are applied nowadays only to the resolution of problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism which is still the fashion does not permit consideration of any facts but those strictly relevant to our experience. Logical ends, on the other hand, escape us. Needless to say that even experience has had limits assigned to it. It revolves in a cage from which it becomes more and more difficult to release it. Even experience is dependent on immediate

utility, and common sense is its keeper. Under colour of civilisation, under pretext of progress, all that rightly or wrongly may be regarded as fantasy or superstition has been banished from the mind, all uncustomary searching after truth has been proscribed. It is only by what must seem sheer luck that there has recently been brought to light an aspect of mental life—to my belief by far the most important—...with which it was supposed that we no longer had any concern. All credit for these discoveries must go to Freud. Based on these discoveries a current of opinion is forming that will enable the explorer of the human mind to extend his investigations, justified as he will be in taking into account more than mere summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind harbour strange forces capable of increasing those of the surface, or of successfully contending with them, then it is all in our interest to canalise them, to canalise them first in order to submit them later, if necessary, to the control of reason. The analysts themselves have nothing to lose by such a proceeding. But it should be observed that there are no means designed *a priori* for the bringing about of such an enterprise, that until the coming of the new order it might just as well be considered to be the affair of poets and scientists, and that its success will not depend on the more or less capricious means that will be employed."

Having amplified this theme and examined at closer range the "strange forces" harboured by our minds and that are manifested in "madness, dream, the absurd, the incoherent, the hyperbolic and

everything that is opposed to the summary appearance of the real,” in the words of Georges Hugnet, Breton goes on to say: “One should take the trouble to *practise* poetry.” This is where those who imagine surrealism to be simply an experimental extension of literature and art are confounded. The most vital feature of surrealism is its exclusive interest in that point at which literature and art give place to real life, that point at which the imagination seeks to express itself in a more concrete form than words or plastic images. Hence the surrealists’ frequent reference to this phrase of Lautréamont’s: “Poetry should be made by all. Not one.”

After an account of certain early surrealist experiments, part of which I have already quoted, Breton makes “once and for all” the following definition, which is by no means so well known in England that I need not quote it here:

“SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought’s dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all æsthetic or moral preoccupations.”

“ENCYCL. *Philos.* Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected

heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought. It tends definitely to do away with all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in the solution of the principal problems of life."

There you have the essentials of surrealism in a few words. A number of supplementary definitions could be added to-day<sup>1</sup> (as indeed they have been in André Breton's pamphlet *What is Surrealism*, published in Belgium in 1934), but the above remains pretty well as valid as when it was first written.

The manifesto continues with a list of writers, philosophers and others, past and present, who may in one way or another be considered as surrealists. The reader will find this list of names reproduced on the flap of the wrapper of the present book. Breton has been careful to note, however, that

"They were not always surrealists, in the sense that one can disentangle in each of them a number of preconceived notions to which—very naively!—they clung. And they clung to them so because they had not heard the *surrealist voice*, the voice that exhorts on the eve of death and in the roaring storm, and because they were unwilling to dedicate themselves to the task of no more than orchestrating the score replete with marvellous things. They were proud instru-

<sup>1</sup> Notably concerning the experimental paranoia of Salvador Dali. See page 21.

ments; hence the sounds they produced were not always harmonious sounds.

“We, on the contrary,” he continues, “who have not given ourselves to processes of filtering, who through the medium of our work have been content to be the silent receptacle of many echoes, modest *registering machines* that are not hypnotised by the pattern that they trace, we are perhaps yet serving a much nobler cause. So we honestly give back the talent lent to us. You may talk of the ‘talent’ of this yard of platinum, of this mirror, of this door and of this sky, if you wish.

“We have no talents, asks *Philippe Soupart*: ‘The anatomical manufactories and the cheap abodes shall destroy the highest towns.’

*Roger Vitrac*:

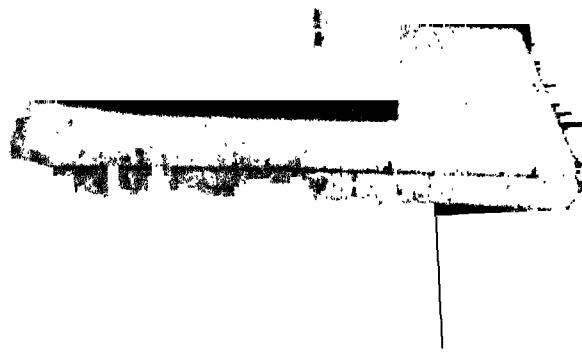
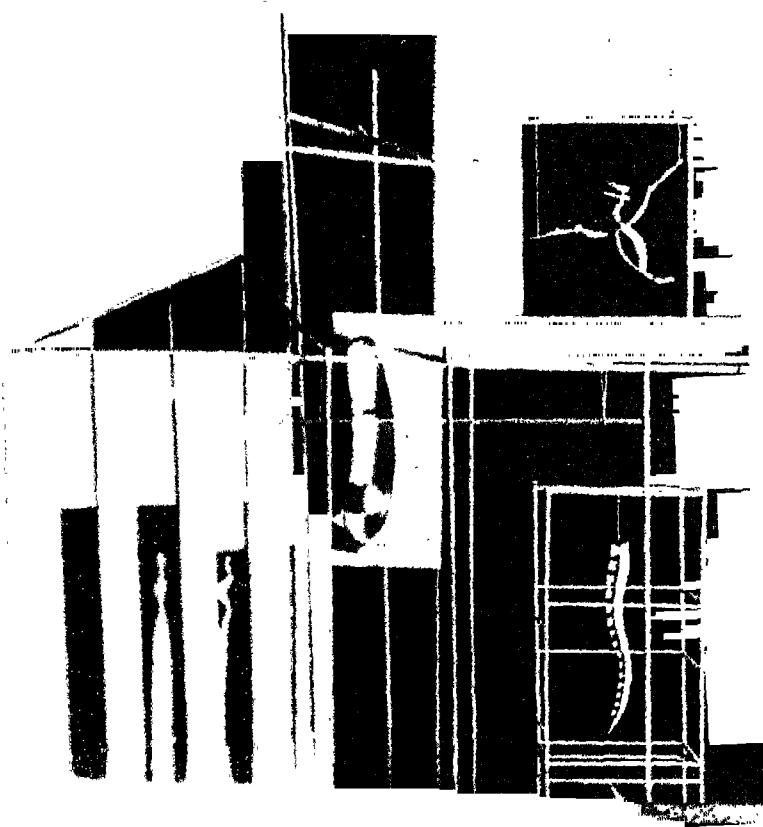
‘Scarcely had I invoked the marble-admiral than the latter turned on his heel like a horse that shies at the Pole star and marked out on the surface of his cocked-hat a region where I was to spend my life.’

*Paul Eluard*:

‘It is a well-known story that I tell, a celebrated poem that I re-read: I am leaning against a wall, with verdant ears and calcinated lips.’

*Max Morise*:

‘The cave-bear and the lout his companion, the *vol-an-vent* and the wind his valet, the Lord High Chancellor and his wife, the sparrow-scarer and the old fellow his compère, the test-tube and her daughter the needle, the cannibal and his brother the carnival, the crossing-sweeper and his monocle, the Mississippi and its little dog, the coral and its



milk-can, the Miracle and its dear God have nothing left to do than to disappear from the surface of the sea.'

*Joseph Delteil:*

'Alas! I am a believer in the virtue of birds. And it only needs a feather to make me die of laughing.'

*Louis Aragon:*

'During an interruption of the party, while the players were joining around a bowl of flaming punch, I asked the tree whether it always wore its red ribbon.'

"And myself, who have been unable to stop writing the bewildered and serpentine lines of this preface.

"Ask Robert Desnos, the one of us who has perhaps got nearer to surrealist truth than anyone, and who, in certain recent works and throughout many experiments to which he has given himself, has fully justified the hope I place in surrealism and allows me to expect much from it. Desnos to-day *speaks* surrealistically at will."<sup>1</sup>

That is a long enough quotation; and to tell the truth I should have liked to translate the entire manifesto from beginning to end; but must be content with simply making a short résumé of its concluding sections.

The passage I have just quoted is followed by a number of "recipes" for surrealist writing, talking, etc., in the manner of Raymond Lulle; these should

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Robert Desnos very soon lost this faculty. He has had no connection with the surrealist movement for many years.

not be taken too seriously. The discussion of language that follows this section is worthy of more attention. "Language has been given to man that he may make a surrealist use of it." In conversation, for instance, when one person replies quite irrespective of what the other has said. In unpremeditated images, such as Reverdy's, "The day was folded like a white cloth." All this is in order to bring about the fusion of two mutually distant realities. (The most celebrated example of such a fusion is, of course, the "chance meeting, on a dissecting-table, of a sewing-machine and an umbrella," of Lautréamont, an image which brings about the union of two mutually distant realities upon a plane equally unrelated to either of them.)

In surrealism one re-lives the best of childhood; it should be possible to establish certain rules concerning surrealism; surrealist poems can be composed from random newspaper-cuttings ("collage" poems); surrealism possesses its devotee like the voice of the ancient oracles: such are the chief remaining points of the manifesto, which ends:

"Surrealism, as I envisage it, displays our complete *non-conformity* so clearly that there can be no question of claiming

it as witness when the real world comes up for trial. On the contrary, it can but testify to the complete state of distraction to which we hope to attain here below. Kant distracted by women, Pasteur distracted by 'grapes,' Curie distracted by traffic, are profoundly symptomatic in this respect. The world is only very relatively proportionate to thought and incidents of this kind are only the most striking episodes of a war of independence in which I glory in taking part. Surrealism is the 'invisible ray' that shall enable us one day to overcome our enemies. 'You tremble no more, carcase.' This summer the roses are blue; the wood is made of glass. The earth wrapped in its foliage makes as little effect on me as a ghost. Living and ceasing to live are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

The surrealists made their first public protest in October 1924, on the occasion of the death of Anatole France. On the day of his funeral they published and distributed in Paris a pamphlet entitled simply: *A Corpse*. "It should be a fête-day on which cunning, traditionalism, patriotism, opportunism, scepticism, realism and heartlessness are buried!" wrote Breton in this joint declaration of disgust.

*The Surrealist Revolution* made its first appearance

<sup>1</sup> In the same volume as the *Manifesto* were published thirty-two surrealist texts, under the title *Soluble Fish*.

two months later, under the direction of Benjamin Péret and Pierre Naville. (It should be mentioned that a "Central Bureau of Surrealist Research" had been open in Paris since the previous October.) The opening number of this first surrealist review contained dreams, automatic texts and a number of illustrations by Chirico, Max Ernst, André Masson, Picasso and Man Ray. On one page there is a photo of the Nice carnival and on another a "still" from a Buster Keaton film, and an entire page is devoted to photographs of the surrealists, with Germaine Berton, the then famous anarchist, in their midst. The most provocative feature is the announcement in large type of an enquête: IS SUICIDE A SOLUTION? At the foot of every other page there are press-cuttings relative to suicide.

The second number, which appeared in January 1925, has a photo of a scarecrow on the cover, with the caption: "French art at the beginning of the twentieth century." Numerous answers to the suicide enquiry, most of them stupid, are printed. At the end, the question is asked again; it is one that none but the dead could answer. The most important features of this number were an article by Breton,

“The Last Strike,” and a declaration headed: “OPEN THE PRISONS. DISBAND THE ARMY.” A growing political conscience, confused as yet, is recognisable in Breton’s article, in which he says: “I believe with all truly free men that the Revolution, even with its abuses, remains the highest and most moving expression that can be given to that love of Good in which the universal will and individual wills are united”; and also, though quite negatively, in an article by Louis Aragon, to-day a strictly orthodox member of the Communist Party, in which he refers to the Russian Revolution as a “vague ministerial crisis,” and defends himself for having written of “doddering Moscow.”

Number three of *The Surrealist Revolution* contrived to be even more sensational than its predecessors. Here are the headings of some of the pages: “Letter to the Rectors of the Universities of Europe”; “Address to the Pope”; “Address to the Dalai-Lama”; “Letter to the Buddhist Schools”; “Letter to the Directors of Lunatic Asylums.” There are also automatic texts and drawings, dreams, poems and photographs as before.

The fourth number, May 1925, opens with an

article by Breton entitled: "Why I have taken over the Editorship of *The Surrealist Revolution*." One of the reasons for this change was that Pierre Naville, the previous editor, had stated that there could be no such thing as surrealist painting. Breton contradicted this by publishing the first instalment of his long study, "Surrealism and Painting," subsequently published in book form. We shall refer to this later. It should be remarked that the first collective exhibition of surrealist painting took place in November of the same year.

In July, a fresh scandal. Paul Claudel, the well-known Catholic and reactionary writer, had insulted dadaism and surrealism in an interview published in the paper *Comœdia*. "Neither dadaism nor surrealism," he said, "have anything but a single meaning: pederastic." There immediately followed the famous "Open Letter to M. Paul Claudel, Ambassador of France to Japan," printed on a single sheet of bright red paper and distributed widely among the general public. "Write, pray and drive!" said the twenty-eight signatories of this letter: "we claim the dishonour of having called you once and for all a prig and a scoundrel."

The same month marked the return to Paris of an old and forgotten poet whom the surrealists much admired, Saint-Pol Roux, known as the Magnificent. A banquet was given in his honour at the Closerie de Lilas, and once more this café was the scene of violence and disorder, for a number of persons of high importance in the literary world had been invited, and when they sat down to table they each found a copy of the letter to Claudel beneath their napkins. The anti-patriotic and subversive after-dinner speeches of the surrealists caused these literary gentlemen to react in the most violent manner. A fight ensued and the interrupted dessert gave place to intervention by the police.

\* \* \*

The appearance of the fifth number of *The Surrealist Revolution*, a month or so after the events described above, marks the complete adherence of the surrealists to Communism. "The Revolution Now and Ever" is the title of the manifesto presented with this number. It is a declaration against patriotism, against France and against the imperialist war in Morocco which was at that time occupying national attention. It was signed by all the

surrealists and also by a number of other revolutionary writers connected with the reviews, *Clarté*, *Correspondance* and *Philosophies*. Since the appearance of this manifesto the development of surrealism has been an entirely dialectical one. The principles of Marxism have given the movement a unity and a purpose that to a large extent were lacking until then. Without the philosophy of dialectical materialism behind it, surrealism could hardly have existed until to-day and be still a living force.

If the period from the end of 1925 till the *Second Manifesto* at the end of 1929 was one of difficulties with the Communist Party on the one hand (the Communists have always treated Breton and the surrealists with a quite unjustifiable suspicion and mistrust), and of personal weaknesses on the other, it was also one of growing confidence and power for surrealism; it saw the appearance of works such as André Breton's *Nadja*, Paul Eluard's *Capitale de la Douleur*, *Les Dessous d'une Vie*, *L'Amour la Poésie*, Benjamin Péret's *Dormir*, *Dormir dans les Pierres*, *Le Grand Jeu*, . . . *Et les Seins Mouraient*, René Crevel's *L'Esprit Contre la Raison*, *Babylone* and *Etes-Vous Fous*, Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*, Robert

Desnos' *La Liberté ou l'Amour*, and Max Ernst's "collage" novel, *La Femme aux Têtes*—works in which the pure spirit of revolt reached a height of expression almost never before equalled; it saw numerous exhibitions of paintings by artists such as Arp, Chirico, Ernst, Miro, Picasso, Man Ray and Yves Tanguy.

The period of preliminary experiment and research that followed the breakdown of Dada was at last bearing fruit. The works I have mentioned naturally I cannot go into in full detail here, but I think I should outline a few of the most important.

The *Nadja* of André Breton is a history of facts. It is an account of an episode in Breton's life during which he made the acquaintance of an extraordinary woman possessed of outstanding surrealist faculties. It is a disturbing book and cannot but give place in the reader's mind to a profound doubt concerning the validity of the normal, everyday world in which we live. There is a pathetic side to the story, for Nadja in the end went mad. The book closes with a very justifiable criticism of lunatic asylums and their officials, which caused Breton to be vigorously attacked in the medical press. He replied to these attacks in an article called "The Treatment of

Mental Disease and Surrealism," in which he said:

"We consider it due to our honour to be the first to call attention to this danger, to make a stand against this unbearable, and increasing, abuse of power by people whom we are inclined to look upon as being not so much doctors as gaolers and indeed as purveyors of penal settlements and scaffolds. . . . We cannot urge them too strongly, even if some of them are doomed to be struck down accidentally by the blows of those whom they seek arbitrarily to control, to have the decency to shut up."

*Surrealism and Painting* is a brilliant and detailed study of that manifestation of surrealism which is as yet the best known side of it in England and America. I need hardly remind the reader of the immense importance in modern art of such painters as Picasso, whom I should not hesitate to call pre-eminently a surrealist painter; Chirico, painter of those great deserted towns which we all seem to remember having visited in one or other of our major dreams<sup>1</sup>; Max Ernst, with his *Histoire Naturelle*, produced by rubbing paper with charcoal across the uneven

<sup>1</sup> *The World of Chirico*. We cannot tell the hour, for these elongated shadows across the square are not those of sundials; beneath the arches of the colonnades they are mystery. Against the infinity of the horizon a train moves towards Nowhere, releasing phantom phantoms of smoke.

Beyond the immobile equestrian statue which has stood at the edge of the square for so long that one has forgotten whom it commemorates, the sea lies waiting for the hour when it shall rise to

surfaces of wood and stone, his mythology of birds and suns and infernal demi-gods, his shell-flowers and flower-birds, the very flora and fauna of dream, and his astonishing books of "collage" pictures, in which the poetry of nightmare is given enduring form<sup>1</sup>; Arp, who reveals a world of freshness, humour and great simplicity in bas-reliefs of plaster and wood; Miro, whose painting is of a type as old as art itself, spontaneous, vivid and full of verve, whose *Ballet Jeux d'Enfants* "has had in England a success among thousands who did not suspect that what was before them to enjoy had been invented by a 'modern' artist and even by a 'mad' surrealist"<sup>2</sup>; Tanguy, creator of the most tragic landscapes that the eye has never seen; and Man Ray,

<sup>1</sup> *La Femine aux Têtes* (1929), *Rêve d'une Petite Fille qui Voulut Entrer au Carmel* (1930), *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934).

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Grigson, in *The Arts To-day*, Bodley Head 1935.

overwhelm this dead and empty city. Roman soldiers wander and terrific horses gallop over the sands.

We enter the colonnade and find our way into a white-washed room. Here there are plaster casts of heads of a type of beauty now extinct; there are gloves, T-squares, cornices, laths, picture-frames, handles of violins, biscuits and strangely-marked wands.

Coming towards us from the doorway with slow, agonizing movements is a menacing and abnormally tall figure, swathed, its head featureless as an egg, with bricks, scaffolding, models of buildings and little arches tumbling from its dreadful breast. Its arm creaks as it raises its rubber hand to point at us, innumerable . . .

who has raised photography to all the dignity of painting and has trapped the world of shadows with his lens. If we find no mention of the work of Salvador Dali in this book of Breton's, which appeared in 1928, it is because the first exhibition of Dali's paintings did not take place until November, 1929; they will be referred to later<sup>1</sup>.

The poems of Paul Eluard are pure crystallisations of tenderness and simplicity, of passion and revolt. Not only does he represent by far the highest achievement of surrealist poetry, he is one of the most considerable French poets living, a direct descendant of Baudelaire. I have already spoken of his *Répétitions* in the previous chapter. *Capitale de la Douleur* and *L'Amour la Poésie* represent a further step towards the complete confidence and power of his most recent poems. *Les Dessous d'Une Vie, ou La Pyramide Humaine* is a collection of dreams, surrealist texts and poems. "Uselessness of poetry," says the preface to this last volume: "the

<sup>1</sup> In his first Manifesto Breton wrote: "I could say as much (that they were surrealist) for certain painters, to mention only Uccello of ancient times. Of the modern period Seurat, Gustave Moreau, Matisse (in "Music" for example), Derain, Picasso (by far the purest), Braque, Duchamp, Picabia, Chirico (so long admirable), Klee, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and, so close to us, André Masson."

perceptible world is excluded from surrealist texts and the most sublime cold light shines on the heights where the mind enjoys such liberty as it would never dream of verifying."

The importance of Louis Aragon to surrealism during the time when he belonged to the movement (we shall have occasion to speak of his "conversion" to the Communist Party later on) should not be underestimated. *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) is the work in which he gave fullest play to his brilliant imagination. It is a study of the surrealist aspect of the old Passage de l'Opéra in Paris, during its last days before it was pulled down to make way for the Boulevard Haussmann.

"Our contributor Benjamin Péret insulting a priest," is the title of one of the photographs published in *The Surrealist Revolution*. It gives a graphic idea of the character of Péret's poems and stories, their brutal, bitter, crazy humour. His hatred of the existing order is evident even in his quietest fantasies. In addition to the collections of his work that I have mentioned, he published in 1925, in collaboration with Paul Eluard, a series of "152 Proverbs adapted to the contemporary taste," from which I

extract the following: "The further it is from the urn, the longer the beard."—"Three dates in a flute."—"Beat your mother while she's young."—"Cold meat puts out no fire."—"Skin that peels goes to heaven."—"He who sows fingernails reaps a torch."—"There is always a skeleton in the buffet."—"All that fattens is not soft."—"Faithful as a boneless cat."—"A corset in July is worth a horde of rats."—"I came, I sat down, I went away." (These proverbs remind one of a surrealist game called "The Exquisite Corpse," after one of the sentences produced while playing it. You sit four or five about a table and pass round a sheet of paper, each one writing in turn, the first an adjective, the second a noun, the third a verb, the fourth an adjective, the fifth a noun. In this way complete sentences are obtained, such as: "The winged vapour seduces the locked bird."—"The Senegal oyster shall eat the tri-coloured bread."—"The headless stars circle round the folded and unfolded cinema-programme."—"The anæmic little girl makes the polished mannequins blush."—Another version of this game is known to children as "Heads, Bodies and Legs." Yet another surrealist game consists of

questions and answers, without the interrogated party knowing what he is being asked, as: Q. "What is butter?" —A. "It is the circle of the mirror, the reflection of a circle." —Q. "What is the sun?" —A. "A polar region, very cold in summer and very hot in winter.")

Finally I must mention the work of René Crevel, whose recent tragic death was a great loss to the surrealist movement. His persistent attacks on modern society and the antiquated systems of thought that just manage to hold it together were particularly distinguished by great vigour, sincerity and brilliance of style. "A novel by Crevel is always more or less a dream, but a dream that allows one to go beyond realism into the deeper existence of things," said a French critic of *Etes-Vous Fous?* There is a good translation by Kay Boyle of a story of his from *Babylone*, "Mr. Knife and Miss Fork," in Number 18 of the American review *transition*; it is a study of the dream-life of a little girl in an unhappy household.

(The poems of René Char should be mentioned here also, as his *Arsenal* first appeared in 1929. They can best be likened to pieces of clear crystal in which the most vivid irrational images are perpetuated, like snowstorms in paperweights.)

From all this it should be clear that surrealism is by no means simply a recipe, or “specific method of creation.” Rather is it a starting-point for works of the most striking diversity, capable of almost infinite variation and development.

\* \* \*

The uneasy relationship between surrealism and the Communist Party is revealed in such works as Pierre Naville’s *La Révolution et les Intellectuels*, André Breton’s *Légitime Défense*, and particularly in the declaration to the Communists, *Au Grand Jour*, all published in 1927. Again and again the surrealists have been forced to point out that a consciousness of the class-struggle does not necessarily express itself in terms of “socialist realism,” that the need for writing of the propaganda type does not in itself condemn research along other lines and that Communism has nothing to gain by suppressing the liberty of thought and expression of declared revolutionaries united in their hatred of the capitalist bourgeoisie and taking every opportunity to make clear their political attitude and their faith in dialectical materialism. (They have recently been driven openly to declare their defiance of the Com-

unist Party, which at present seems to be showing itself more than ever bent on disproving Lenin's contention that a party manifests its strength by being able to support division in its ranks.) A French critic once displayed a considerable sense of proportion by observing that "the whole activity of the surrealists cannot be reduced to a simple automatism. They use writing in quite a voluntary fashion, contradictory to the feeling that they have for this automatism, and for ends that cannot be gone into here. One can state quite simply that their actions and their painting belong to that vast enterprise of re-creating the universe to which both Lautréamont and Lenin gave themselves entirely."

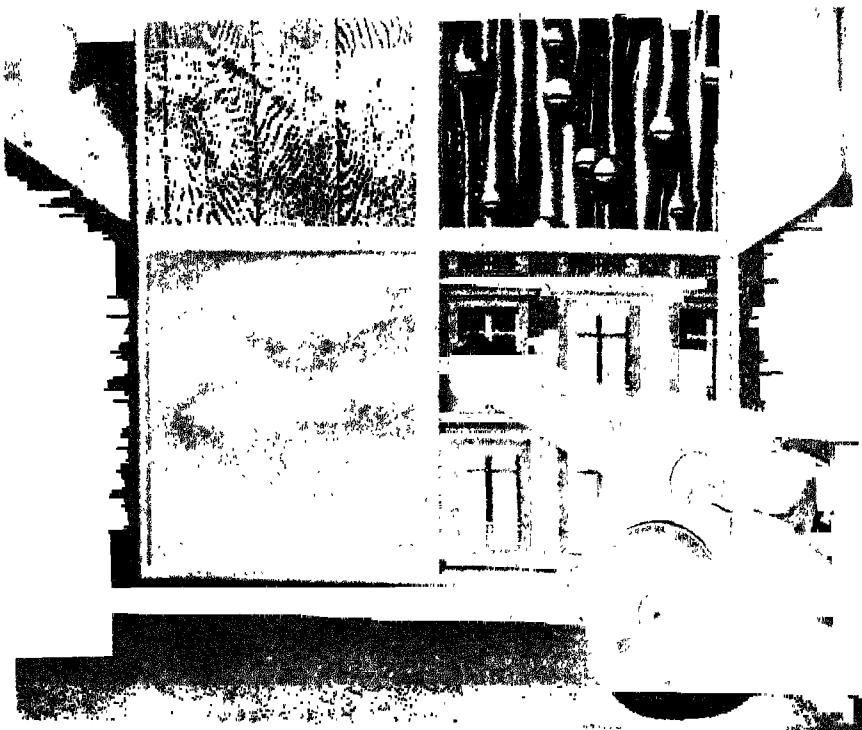
Meanwhile *The Surrealist Revolution* continued to appear. Number 9-10, October 1927, contains a sensational document headed (in English) HANDS OFF LOVE. This is a full statement of the surrealist attitude towards sexual morality, occasioned by the Chaplin divorce case. It was first published in the review *transition*, Number 6, but apparently the surrealists were dissatisfied with the manner of its presentation there and so reprinted the original French text in their own periodical. Number 11

made its appearance in March 1928, and is chiefly remarkable for the "Researches on Sexuality" that it contains. As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, the surrealists have always demanded the maximum amount of liberty in every field, and the field of sexuality is in no way an exception to this. Their attitude towards sex is almost identical with that of the Marquis de Sade or William Blake. The same number contains an article by Breton and Aragon marking the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria (defined by Charcot at Salpêtrière in 1878).

A year and nine months elapsed between the appearance of the 11th and the 12th and last number of *The Surrealist Revolution*. During this time the only sign of concerted surrealist activity was the special number of the Belgian review *Variétés* devoted to "Surrealism in 1929" (June). The reason for this silence is to be found in the fact that this was a period of grave internal crisis for surrealism. A long series of petty bickerings, reactions and betrayals was coming to a head, to be finally dealt with by André Breton in his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, published in the final number of *The Surrealist Revolution*, December 1929.

It is not my intention to go into in full detail here the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (a substantial part of which has already been translated in the surrealist number of *This Quarter*) even though it is in many ways more important than the first. The function it performed was that of restating the surrealist programme in the light of five years' active experience, and of breaking away from certain former collaborators who had shown themselves incapable of maintaining the standards required of them.

It was no doubt unfortunate for surrealism that MM. Artaud, Carrive, Delteil, Gerard, Limbour, Masson, Soupault and Vitrac should have turned to journalism, commercialism and calumnious disloyalty; that MM. Baron and Naville should have found it more paying to flirt with *vulgar-marxismus*; that MM. Desnos and Ribemont-Dessaignes should have been unable to resist the temptation to enter the "literary world" with its vulgar prospects of "success." But it was possible to dispense with their services without the surrealist movement being in



On the Threshold of Liberty

RENE MAGRITTE (1932)

any way seriously disabled by their loss. Breton was merciless, no doubt, and his vigorous denunciation of those who had once regarded him as their friend was unhesitatingly brought up against him by his enemies, who had not, perhaps, realised that his attachment to the original purity of surrealism was so profound that nothing, certainly not fear of intolerance, would prevent him from defending it.

Since I have not the space at my disposal to translate here the entire manifesto, a large part of which is devoted to dealing with the cases of the various former surrealists mentioned above, I will content myself with quoting its opening and its conclusion.

“Whatever may have been the controversial issues raised by former or present followers of surrealism, all will admit that the drift of surrealism has always and chiefly been towards a general and emphatic *crisis in consciousness* and it is only when this is happening or is shown to be impossible that the success or historic eclipse of the movement will be decided.

“Intellectually it was and still is a question of exposing by every available means, and to learn at all price to identify, the factitious nature of the conflicts hypocritically calculated to hinder the setting on foot of any unusual agitation to give mankind were it only a faint understanding of its latent

possibilities and to inspire it to free itself from its fetters by all the means available. The horror of death, the pantomime of the beyond, the total breakdown of the most beautiful intellect in dream, the towers of Babel, the mirror of inconstancies, the insuperable silver-splashed wall of the brain, all these startling images of human catastrophes are perhaps nothing but images after all.

“There is a hint in all this of a belief that there exists a certain spiritual plane on which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, are not conceived of as opposites. It would therefore be vain to attribute to surrealism any other motive than the hope to determine that plane, as it would be absurd to ascribe to it a purely destructive or constructive character: the point at issue being precisely this, that construction and destruction should no longer be flaunted against one another. It becomes clear also that surrealism is not at all interested in taking into account what passes alongside it under the guise of art and is in fact anti-art, philosophy or anti-philosophy, all, in a word, that has not for its ultimate end the conversion of the being into a jewel, internal and unseeing, with a soul that is neither of ice nor of fire. What, indeed, do they expect of surrealism, who are still anxious about the position they may occupy *in the world*? On that mental plane from which one may for oneself alone embark on the perilous, but, we think, supreme exploit, on that plane the footfalls of those who come or go are no longer of any importance, because their echo will be repeated in a land in which, by delimitation, surrealism possesses no listening ear. It is not desirable that

surrealism should be dependent on the whim of this or that person. If it declares itself capable of ransoming thought to a servitude more and more task-driven, to bring it back to the path of complete understanding, to restore to it its pristine purity, it is indeed no more than right that it should be judged only by what it has done and by what it has still to accomplish in the fulfilment of its promise."

\* \* \*

"Surrealism is less ready than ever to accept departures from this purity and to content itself with what both this set of persons and that are ready to devote to it in between a couple of little betrayals which they think justified by the obscure and revolting pretext that one must live. We will not put up with this charity of the 'talents.' It seems to us that what we are asking for is something involving either a wholehearted assent or a wholehearted refusal, and that there must be no mere pouring out of empty words nor mere profession of fanciful hopes. Is a man ready to risk everything so that at the very bottom of the crucible into which we propose throwing our poor abilities, what remains of our reputation and our doubts, all jumbled up with the jolly 'sensible' glassware, the radical notion of impotence and the absurdity of our supposed duties, he may have the joy of catching a glimpse of *the light which will cease to flicker*?"

"We maintain that the only chance of success for the surrealist operation lies in its being performed under conditions of moral asepsis, and the idea of this asepsis is still one that few men will entertain. Yet otherwise there can be no arresting of that cancer of the mind which consists in thinking far too sadly that certain things 'are' when others,

which might so well be, 'are not.' We have contended that the things which are and the things which might so well be should be fused, or thoroughly intercept each other, at the limits. What has to be done is not to be content with that, but *to be unable to do less than tend desperately towards those limits.*

"A man who wrongly allows himself to be put off by a few monstrous historical failures, is still free to *believe* in his freedom. He is his own master, despite the old clouds which pass and his blind powers which stumble. Has he not a sense of brief and stolen beauty and of accessible, enduring and stealable beauty? That key of love which the poet claimed to have found, he too, if only he takes the trouble to look, he too has it. It depends solely on him whether he shall rise above the fleeting feeling of living dangerously and of dying. Let him despise all prohibitions and let him make use of that avenging weapon, the *idea*, against the beastliness of all beings and all things, and let him on the day when he is defeated—but he will be defeated only if *the world is the world*—let him treat the firing of the pathetic rifles as a volley of salute."<sup>1</sup>

Before passing on it should be said that between these two passages are to be found: a reconsideration of the original surrealist method of automatism, a clear definition of the strict moral attitude of surrealism, and a restatement of the surrealists' faith in dialectical materialism: ("How allow that the

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Edward W. Titus, from *This Quarter*, Vol. 5, No. 1, September 1932.

dialectical method is only to be applied validly to solving social problems? It is the whole of surrealism's ambition to supply this method with no-wise conflicting possibilities of application in the most immediate conscious domain. I really cannot see, *pace* a few muddle-headed revolutionaries, why we should abstain from taking up the problems of love, of dreaming, of madness, of art, of religion, so long as we consider these problems from the same angle as they, and we too, consider Revolution.") The *Second Manifesto* is clearly an event of considerable importance in the history of surrealism and should be studied in its entirety by anyone particularly interested in the movement.

A month or so after the first appearance of the manifesto, those whom it had excluded from the group retaliated with a pamphlet entitled: *A Corpse* (after the famous Anatole France pamphlet), on the cover of which was to be found a faked photograph of André Breton crowned with thorns, and which contained nothing of any interest, only a series of remarkably violent insults; the signatories made no attempt to disprove the accusations that Breton had brought against them.

The twelfth and last number of *La Révolution Surrealiste* (shortly to be replaced by *Le Surrealisme au Service de la Révolution*) contained many other remark-worthy features besides the *Second Manifesto*. —Tristan Tzara, his quarrel with Breton mended after a period of seven years, during which, after the liquidation of Dada, he had been publishing poems that were fully in accord with the principles of surrealism (*Mouchoir de Nuages*, 1925; *Indicateur des Chemins de Cœur*, 1928; *De Nos Oiseaux*, 1929), was represented in this number by a long fragment from his then most recent poem, *L'Homme Approximatif*<sup>1</sup>. I am inclined to regard this as one of the finest achievements of surrealist poetry; certainly it is one of the most remarkable French poems written since the War. Considering its great length, the perpetual flow of absolutely new and very striking images is an almost unparalleled feat in itself; the culminating effect is indeed that of the primitive emotional and constructive power that is concealed in the depths of the essential, integral being of man.

<sup>1</sup> See *This Quarter and Transition*, No. 19-20.

Examples of the painting of Salvador Dali, whose first exhibition had taken place the previous month, were reproduced for the first time in this number of *La Révolution Surréaliste*. The entrance of this figure into surrealist activity was in itself enough to compensate for the loss of those with whom connections had just been severed. Another important feature consisted of the scenario of the film, *Un Chien Andalou*, which had caused much scandal and sensation at its first showings at the *Studio 28* cinema during the autumn of 1929. With the exception of an experimental film by Man Ray, *L'Etoile de Mer* (1928), for which Robert Desnos wrote the script, and *La Perle* (1929), a film by Georges Hugnet, who at that time had no connection with the surrealist movement, *Un Chien Andalou*, by Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel, was the first surrealist film to be produced. It is a grotesque and terrifying film, liable to cause hysteria among audiences from whom Karloff could not raise the least shiver. Sample shot:

"The following pass across the screen: first, a cork, then a melon, then two teachers from a church school, and finally two magnificent grand pianos. The pianos are filled with the

carcasses of donkeys, their legs, tails, hind-quarters and excrement sticking out of the piano-cases. As one piano passes across the screen, a huge donkey's head is seen resting on its keyboard."

Containing, among other items, an article which tells us "How to Deal with Priests," a series of poems by Benjamin Péret, an article by the Belgian painter, René Magritte, concerning the relation between words and visual images, an article by a doctor on the unconscious motives of suicide, a series of notes on the nature of poetry by Breton and Eluard, and an article by Aragon entitled "Introduction to 1930," the review closes with a number of answers to the enquiry: *What sort of hope do you place in love?*

\* \* \*

During the spring of 1930, at Avignon, where they were on holiday together, André Breton, René Char and Paul Eluard collaborated in an experiment to which they gave the name of *Ralentir Travaux*. This was a collection of poems, not poems by three different people but poems in each of which all three had taken a hand. The results were on the whole surprisingly good. There should be no need to point out the extreme anti-individualist nature of such an experiment.

On their return to Paris, the first number of *Le Surrealisme au Service de la Révolution* was produced, a marked improvement, one can unhesitatingly say, on its predecessor. It opens with a telegram received by the surrealist, from the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature, Moscow: "Kindly reply to the following question: What will be your position if Imperialism declares war on the Soviets?" To which the reply: "Comrades, if Imperialism declares war on the Soviets our position will conform to the directions of the Third International, position of the Communist Party of France.

"If you can think of better employment for our faculties in such a case we are at your disposal for precise mission in so much as intellectuals. To submit suggestions to you would be to presume upon our rôle and circumstances.

"In the present situation of non-armed conflict we believe it useless to wait to put at the service of the revolution the means that are particularly ours."

Still looked upon only with suspicion by the Communist Party, it was reassuring to the surrealists to know that at least their existence was acknowledged by Moscow.

A declaration of solidarity with André Breton is printed on another page, signed by Maxime Alexandre, Aragon, Joë Bousquet, Luis Bunuel, René Char, René Crevel, Salvador Dali, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Marcel Fourrier, Camille Goemans, Georges Malkine, Paul Nougé, Benjamin Péret, Francis Ponge, Marco Ristitch, Georges Sadoul, Yves Tanguy, André Thirion, Tristan Tzara and Albert Valentin.

Perhaps the most important feature of the first number of this review is André Breton's article on the suicide of the Soviet poet, Maïakovsky, one of the few Russian poets since the Revolution to attempt to widen the rather narrow limits of "proletarian literature." "More than ever," wrote Breton, "now that Maïakovsky is dead, we refuse to register the weakening of the spiritual and moral position that he took up. We deny, and shall continue to do so, the possibility of a poetry or of an art susceptible of accommodating itself to extremist simplification—*à la Barbusse*—of ways of thinking and feeling. We have yet to be shown a 'proletarian' work of art. The enthusiastic life of the struggling proletariat, the stupifying and shattering life of the mind

a prey to its own beasts, for our part it would be too vain to wish to take part in only one of these two distinct dramas. Expect no concession from us in this domain."

The surrealists had a great admiration for Maïakovsky, a truly revolutionary poet but one who made no compromise between his conception of poetry and the superficial idea of propaganda that he found himself up against. A stupid article published in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* shortly after Maïakovsky's death provoked Louis Aragon to visit its author and teach him a painful lesson.

In the same number of this review are to be found photographs from the second film of Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel, *L'Age d'Or*, which when shown at the *Studio 28* created an even greater scandal than *Un Chien Andalou*: repeated riots caused the police to close it down at the end of a week. "My general idea in writing with Bunuel the scenario of *The Golden Age*," wrote Dali in the manifesto programme, "has been to present the straight and pure line of 'conduct' of a man who pursues love in face of ignoble humanitarian, patriotic ideals and other miserable mechanisms of reality." The film, which

opens with an allegory of the founding of Rome and closes with an incident from the Marquis de Sade's *120 Jours en Sodome*, tells the story of a man who neglects the philanthropic mission with which he has been entrusted by the government, thus causing the death of thousands of women and children, for the sake of his passionate love for a woman. The erotic parts of the film reach a high pitch of violence, culminating in a scene during which a flaming fir-tree, an enormous agricultural implement, an archbishop, a giraffe and some feathers are all flung out of a bedroom window at the top of a house. Other details include the ill-treating of a blind man, a dog being run over, a father killing his son on the spur of the moment, and an old woman having her face slapped. It is impossible to imagine what would happen were this film to be shown in England, even to a Film Society audience.

Salvador Dali, a Catalan, brought with him into surrealism an element until then almost unknown to it. His most important contribution to surrealist experiment is his paranoiac method of criticism, first mention of which is to be found in an essay

entitled *The Stinking Ass*, which also appeared in the first number of *Le Surréalisme A.S.D.R.*, and was subsequently published in Dali's book *La Femme Visible* (1930), a tribute to his wife (formerly Madame Eluard). "Dali has endowed surrealism with an instrument of primary importance," said André Breton in a lecture given at Brussels in 1934, "in particular the paranoiac-critical method, which has immediately shown itself capable of being applied equally well to painting, poetry, the cinema, to the construction of typical surrealist objects, to fashions, to sculpture, to the history of art and even, if necessary, to all manner of exegesis."

The second number of *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, which appeared later in the same year, contains poems, notes on current events, articles, etc., as before; but its most interesting feature is a text by Breton and Eluard, *L'Homme*, an extract from their book, *L'Immaculée Conception*.

*The Immaculate Conception*, published in December 1930, is the most significant surrealist book of this period. The section called *The Possessions* consists of a series of simulations of various types of mental disease—mental debility, acute mania, general

paralysis, delirium of interpretation and dementia *præcox*. "The authors are particularly anxious," says the preface, "that these five essays, intended for the specialist as well as for the lay reader, should be considered as constituting an absolutely sincere enterprise on their part; to suppose them in any way indebted to clinical texts, were it only to the extent of representing a more or less skilful pastiche of such texts, would be to presume them devoid of both necessity and efficacy. They have not been tempted by the charms of the picturesque into reproducing naïvely the phraseology that is considered, rightly or wrongly, as the least expressive of the objects to which it is applied; nor have they been satisfied to point the authentic curiosity of such a phraseology; on the contrary, they have shown that, given a state of *poetic* tension, the normal mind is capable of furnishing verbal material of the most profoundly paradoxical and eccentric nature, and it is possible for such a mind to harbour the main ideas of delirium without being permanently affected thereby or in any way jeopardised in its faculty of equilibrium."

There are other texts in the collection, the series

*Man* (with the sub-titles: "Conception," "Pre-natal Life," "Birth," "Life," "Death"); *The Mediations* ("Force of Habit," "Surprise," "Nothing is Incomprehensible," "The Sentiment of Nature," "Love," "The Idea of Becoming"); and *The Original Judgment*, a series of surrealist proverbs. But the simulations of madness are the book's most important feature. "The new phase of surrealist experiment," says Salvador Dali, "is given a really vital character and as it were defined by the simulations of mental diseases which in *The Immaculate Conception* André Breton and Paul Eluard have contrasted with their various poetic styles. Thanks to simulation in particular and images in general, we have been enabled, not only to establish communication between automatism and the road to the object, but also to regulate the system of interferences between them, automatism being thereby far from diminished but, as it were, liberated. Through the new relation thus established our eyes see the light of things in the external world. Thereupon, however, we are seized with a new fear. Deprived of the company of our former habitual phantoms, which only too well ensured our peace of mind, we are led to regard the



world of objects, the objective world, as the true and manifested content of a new dream." (*The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment.*)

*The Immaculate Conception* and *The Visible Woman* are typical examples of the new, active, attitude of surrealism, as contrasted with its more or less passive attitude prior to the *Second Manifesto*. Dali's system of paranoia, which I have already mentioned provisionally, demonstrates this. It should perhaps be explained that Dali's use of the word *paranoia* does not signify "persecution-mania" (as the word has come to mean almost exclusively in English); to him, persecution-mania is but an isolated example of paranoia, which is a mental state enabling the subject, with a superhuman swiftness of mind defying analysis, to draw from the objective world a concrete proof, or illustration, of his obsessions, or even of his transitory ideas. (Thus the subject of persecution-mania is continually able to draw proof from even the minutest details of other people's conversation, behaviour, etc., that he is being persecuted.) Dali, for instance, is particularly preoccupied with a certain period of the painting of Picasso, and is seated at his desk about to write down his ideas about this;

looking through his papers for some notes he comes across a picture-postcard that someone had quite carelessly sent to him some time before; it immediately appears to him to be a head by Picasso of the particular period about which he is going to write; closer examination proves, however, that the postcard, sideways up, is a photograph of an African village with natives sitting outside their huts. He then shows the postcard to his wife, without any explanation, and she also remarks the head; the maid, when questioned, gives the same reply; André Breton, when shown the postcard, declares it to be a portrait of the Marquis de Sade. Dali claims that it is the paranoiac faculty that enables him to discover a head where there was, until he looked at it, only an African village. It is his paranoiac faculty, likewise, that enables him to give a most disconcerting interpretation to that famous painting of Millet's, *The Angelus*. It is paranoia that causes him to be constantly aware of the similarities between eating and making love, and to use innumerable "edible" metaphors in his writings, and "edible" images in his paintings, which are so full of erotic significance. As to those who say that Dali is "revolting," "patho-

logical," a "muck-raker," and so on, they can very well be answered as follows:

"We cannot tell whether the three great images (*simulacres*)—excrement, blood and putrefaction—are not precisely concealing the *wished-for* 'treasure islands.' Being connoisseurs of images, we have long since learned to recognise the image of desire in images of terror, and even the reawakening of 'golden ages' in the shameful scatological images."

As every psychologist knows, the child loves his own excrement until he has been *taught* that it is dirty. It is only by fully understanding the arbitrary conventions, dogmas and laws that make up our civilisation that we can hope to begin to remedy it when the future society shall have been formed. Those who are always so ready to cry shame seldom reveal anything but their own predispositions.

\*       \*       \*

The period 1930–31 saw also the appearance of *Artine*, by René Char, an author whose work has already been mentioned but which is somewhat difficult to describe very clearly. *Artine*, one might say, is a series of precise statements of vague thoughts inspired by an indefinable being.

"Sometimes a careless movement caused a head that was not mine to fall on Artine's throat. Then, the enormous mass

of sulphur consumed itself slowly, without smoke, presence in itself and vibrating stillness."

Char, more than any other surrealist writer, is concerned with clarity and careful detail. His collected writings were published in 1934 under the title: *Le Marteau Sans Maître*.

It is interesting to mention as appearing at this time a short study of Paul Klee by René Crevel; for there is a misunderstanding to be cleared up here.

"He (Klee) is sometimes claimed by the French group known as *Surréalistes*," says Mr. Herbert Read in his book *The Meaning of Art*, "but if there is any question of relationship, it is the *Surréalistes* who derive from Klee, not Klee from the *Surréalistes*." Now there is really no question of derivation at all, on either side; to suppose that would be to suppose a question of formal or æsthetic values. Surrealistic painting is not the *monopoly* of those artists who have devoted their whole energies to a systematic exploration of surrealist means of expression in the plastic domain, as Ernst, Dali and Tanguy, for instance, have done; for surrealistic art has existed at all times and in all countries. Uccello, Bosch, Breughel, Callot, El Greco, Goya,

Blake, certain pre-Raphaelites, Millet, Boecklin, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, Aubrey Beardsley, James Ensor, Chagall, Pierre Roy, Henry Moore, to mention only a few, may all be regarded as surrealist artists, and nearly all the best so-called "primitive" art may be regarded as surrealist also. All drawing, painting or sculpture that is not primarily or exclusively preoccupied with æsthetic form ("pure form" in the Roger Fry sense) or with the mere reproduction of the bald external appearance of logical reality, may legitimately be termed surrealist, in the widest sense of the word. In the narrow sense of the word, admittedly, surrealist art with a capital S should refer to the work of those who belong, or have belonged, to the specific surrealist group. I draw the following names from the catalogue to the surrealist exhibition held in Teneriffe recently: Arp, Hans Bellmer, Victor Brauner, Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dali, Oscar Dominguez, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Maurice Henry, Valentine Hugo, Marcel Jean, Dora Maar, René Magritte, Joan Miró, Mereth Oppenheim, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, Jindrich Svrski, Yves Tanguy. Eight nationalities are represented by these names, and there are still others.

The most scandalous thing about surrealist art, from the point of view of the reactionary critics, is its tendency to do away with the old hierarchies of technical skill, "fine drawing," craftsmanship, etc. Surrealism represents the point at which poetry and painting merge one into the other; and if poetry should be made by all, not one, then everyone should be able to make pictures, also. What upset the critics most about Dada was that plastic works by all the dadaist writers were shown at the Dada exhibitions; what would happen to the artist's prestige, they wondered (and of their own, reflected from it), if such a thing were to become more general? It would vanish; or the idea of what constitutes an artist would have to undergo a great change. All that is needed to produce a surrealist picture is an unshackled imagination (and the surrealists have often claimed that every human being is endowed with imagination, be he aware of it or not), and a few materials: paper or cardboard, pencil, scissors, paste, and an illustrated magazine, a catalogue or a newspaper. The marvellous is within everyone's reach.

Louis Aragon's *La Peinture au Défi* (1930)

constitutes a brilliant study of this aspect of surrealism. He examines the whole question of the artist's prestige as a specialist and the means of undermining it, describing the progress of *collage* from the early days of cubism to the recent experiments of René Magritte. There are, to begin with, the *papiers collés* of Picasso and Braque (newspaper, wallpaper, cigarette-packets), of which Tristan Tzara says: "A shape cut out of newspaper and incorporated in a design or a picture unites the commonplace, a piece of everyday reality, with another reality constructed by the mind. The difference between various kinds of matter, that the eye is able to translate into tactile sensation, gives a new depth to the picture, in which weight is inscribed with mathematical precision on the symbol of volume, and its density, its taste, its consistency, place us before an unique reality created by the forces of the mind and of dream." Ernst goes further than the cubists and creates pictures entirely from pieces of other, ready-made, pictures by forgotten or anonymous artists. Miro uses nails, string, pieces of wood, as well as cutout papers (at his last exhibition there were pictures containing great brutal hanks of tarry rope).

Francis Picabia once created a portrait entirely from blotting-paper, pen-nibs, wire, curtain-rings, needles and other objects; and one of Picasso's recent paintings contains pieces of straw and a real butterfly.

Other simple methods resembling *collage* include *frottage* (rubbing paper with charcoal over an uneven surface) as used by Max Ernst in his *Histoire Naturelle*; written words incorporated in pictures, as used by René Magritte; and shadow-impressions on sensitised paper, as used by Man Ray (*Rayograms*).

All these experiments prelude the invention of the surrealist object, first announced by Salvador Dali in the third number of *Le Surrealisme au Service de la Révolution* (December, 1931). Surrealist objects are of all sizes and of all degrees of complexity; they can generally be defined as *objects functioning symbolically*. Marcel Duchamp's cage of sugar, already mentioned; the bronze glove referred to in Breton's *Nadja*; certain pieces of "sculpture" by Alberto Giacometti; certain works by Joan Miró—all these are surrealist objects, concrete fantasies, irrational and perverse. Closer and more systematic attention to the idea of making such objects produced such

things as a plaster head of a roaring lion with a fried egg in its mouth, a hairdresser's bust of a woman with a loaf of bread on her head surmounted by a metal inkstand representing Millet's *Angelus* (both by Dali), and the following, by André Breton:

"An earthenware receptacle filled with tobacco on which are two long pink sugared almonds, is placed on a little bicycle-saddle. A polished wooden globe which can revolve in the axis of the saddle causes, when it moves, the end of this saddle to come in contact with two orange celluloid antennæ. The sphere is connected by means of two arms of the same material, with an hour-glass lying horizontally (so that the sand does not move), and with a bicycle-bell intended to ring when a green sugared almond is slung into the axis by means of a catapult behind the saddle. The whole affair is mounted on a board covered with woodland vegetation which leaves exposed here and there a paving of percussion-caps, and in one corner of the board, more thickly covered with leaves than the rest, there stands a small sculptured alabaster book, the cover of which is ornamented with a glazed photograph of the Tower of Pisa, and near this one finds, by moving the leaves, a cap which is the only one to have gone off: it is under the hoof of a doe."

These objects typify the more recent ideas of surrealism, which conceive super-reality as existing in the material world, objectively, as well as subjectively in the automatic thought of the unconscious.

The third number of *Le Surrealisme au Service*

*de la Révolution* appeared simultaneously with the fourth. In addition to Dali's article on surrealist objects, a commemoration of Hegel, an extract from André Breton's *The Communicating Vessels* and the usual poems and photos, it contains two particularly interesting articles by Louis Aragon, one entitled: *Lewis Carroll in 1931* (Aragon had just translated *The Hunting of the Snark*), and the other: *Surrealism and the Future of Revolution*. Number 4 contains another extract from *The Communicating Vessels*, an article by René Crevel on *Patriotism and the Unconscious*, an extremely interesting and valuable *Essay on the Situation of Poetry* by Tristan Tzara, an astonishing *Revery* by Dali, and a few poems by Paul Eluard, including the following *Critique de la Poésie*:

“Of course I hate the reign of the bourgeois  
The reign of cops and priests  
But I hate still more the man who does not hate it  
As I do  
With all his strength.  
I spit in the face of that despicable man  
Who of all my poems does not prefer this *Critique de la Poésie*.”

But to return to Aragon's *Surrealism and the Future of Revolution*: it is in this article that we can

observe the first signs of certain manœuvres that were shortly to lead to what was known as *The Aragon Affair*. In November, 1930, Aragon had been to Russia, with Georges Sadoul, to represent surrealism at the Kharkov Congress of Revolutionary Writers. Since then he had been in a most divided frame of mind; and although in this particular article he defends surrealism very successfully against the criticisms that were levelled against the surrealists in a resolution passed at this Congress, it is likely that the article did not express what Aragon really believed at that time. He was not yet anxious to break away from the surrealists, because he was not yet sure of how he would be received by the orthodox Communists. A month later, however, the publication containing his poem *Red Front* was seized, and the events that followed provided him with an excellent opportunity to betray his former friends.

For the following account of the Aragon Affair I am indebted to the now defunct American review *Contempo*, and to Mr. Jay du Von, the author of the article<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> I have taken the liberty of altering Mr. du Von's "Super-realists" to "surrealists."

"Louis Aragon's militant poem *The Red Front* first appeared in the French edition of *Literature of the World Revolution*, a literary magazine published in Moscow by the *International Union of Revolutionary Writers*. After the edition had been on sale for nearly three months, the French police seized the remaining 350 copies in the bookshop of *l'Humanité*, the Communist daily paper in Paris, and Aragon's indictment followed.

"There were two charges, first, that of 'inciting to murder,' based on the following lines in *The Red Front*:

*Fire on Leon Blum*

*Fire on Boncour Frossard Deat*

*Fire on the trained bears of the social democracy*, and second, that of 'provoking insubordination in the army,' Aragon being held responsible not only for his own work, but as an editor of *Literature of the World Revolution*, for the contribution of V. Vichnevsky, *The Cavalry of Boudionny*, which appeared in the same number.

"Immediately after his indictment in January, 1932, the surrealist group, of which Aragon was one of the founders, sponsored a petition of protest which was circulated throughout Europe. The petition read, in part:

"The indictment of Aragon for his poem *The Red Front*, an indictment which exposes him to a sentence of five years in prison, is unprecedented in France.

"We protest against any attempt to give legal significance to a poetic work and demand the immediate withdrawal of the charge."

"More than three hundred of the most important writers in Europe signed the petition and the support was obtained

of the entire membership, over sixty thousand, of the French branch of the *International Red Aid*.

"Either as a result of this protest and a fear of the case becoming a *cause célèbre*, or because there seemed little hope of obtaining a conviction, the proceedings against Aragon were soon dropped.

2

"However, the simple facts of the case are less interesting than some of the issues involved, including the refusals of certain prominent writers to sign the protest—and their reasons—and the repercussions of the affair among the surrealists themselves.

"As the surrealists maintained in their protest, legal action against the author of an incendiary poem was without precedent *in France and in proceeding against the author of a poem as it had proceeded against the author of a revolutionary article or against a distributor of pamphlets*, the French government was making a new step in the direction of Fascist suppression. Yet it was exactly on this point that the greatest discussion was raised. On the 9th of February *l'Humanité* published an article calling attention to the Aragon Affair and asking for protests against all manifestations of bourgeois suppression:

"But we rigorously denounce the use of this affair by the surrealists as a means of advertising themselves. Instead of fighting bourgeois suppression, the surrealists are fighting only against the suppression of a lyric poem. They demand political immunity for poets and for poets alone. *We protest against any attempt to give legal significance to a poetic work*, they write.

'We cannot approve of the stand of those intellectuals who fail to stir when suppression strikes the workers and who move heaven and earth when it skims their precious persons.'

'The surrealist petition is a let-down pure and simple. In place of defending the content of the poem, they beat a retreat all along their *red front*. Their revolutionism is only verbal.'

'They allow prosecution of *the forms of exact expression of thought*, but they want an exception made for poetry.'

'The bourgeoisie, in its suppression of the revolutionary proletariat, sometimes strikes those who are clinging by chance to the working-class movement. Such is the meaning of the *Aragon Affair*.'

"Somewhat the same stand was taken by Romain Rolland and several others in their refusal to sign the surrealist petition. Other writers based their refusal to sign the protest on quite different reasons. One of the most violently reactionary was Charles Richet, who wrote: 'I know nothing of the Aragon Affair and have nothing to say on it. I only know that to defend the U.S.S.R. is to apologise for theft and assassination.' Hardly less reactionary but more tactful, André Gide refused to sign on the ground that he had been informed that the proceedings were in the nature of an inquiry, rather than a criminal action, and that in that case, he felt a protest was immature and likely to precipitate more serious action."

"Other writers signed the protest, but qualified their signatures with personal amendments. André Lebey, for example, added the sentence, 'Long live Liberty, even after

the Bolsheviks have triumphed and Aragon no longer desires it.' And Pierre Reverdy, an early surrealist, appended the anarchistic note, 'Not placing any hope of relief for legitimate revolt in any form of government whatsoever, my name on this petition is a testimonial of friendly and fraternal solidarity.'

"Bernard Brunius signed the petition, but wrote: 'The poem, surpassing in significance and portent its immediate content, becomes more subversive than any other form of expression. And as its value can be measured by its measure of effectiveness, it is not surprising to see it prosecuted. It is right that *art for the revolution* should expose the poet to the same risks as any other form of militant Communist activity.'

"These and other objections to the protest were answered in a pamphlet by André Breton entitled *The Misery of Poetry*, which was published on the 5th of March by the surrealists. In reviewing the stand of *l'Humanité* and the various refusals, Breton claimed that it was because of their desire to show clearly the accentuation of government suppression in France and to point out the exceptional character of the proceedings brought against Aragon, that the surrealists had not sufficiently protested against the more general suppression which was being constantly exercised against political offenders. The surrealists had taken it for granted, he explains, that their attitude in regard to it was beyond doubt, and that they had conceived their rôle as one of interesting the French intellectual circles, which had scarcely been touched by revolutionary propaganda, in the defence of intellectual freedom, and by so doing to participate more effectively in the struggle against general suppression.

## 3

"At about the same time as the appearance of *Misery of Poetry*, the French section of *The International Union of Revolutionary Writers*, an organisation to be known as the *Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers of France*, was formed in Paris. Their manifesto, published in *l'Humanité*, called on all writers who claimed to be revolutionary to join the Association on a platform of dialectical materialism and the resolutions of the Kharkov Conference (November 1930).

"As a result of the formation of the *Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers*, the best elements separated themselves from the surrealist group, including Aragon, Georges Sadoul, Bunuel, Pierre Unik and Maxime Alexandre, and *l'Humanité* published the following statement on the 10th of March:

'Our comrade Aragon has informed us that he had nothing to do with the publication of a brochure entitled *The Misery of Poetry* and signed by André Breton. He wishes to make it very clear that he disapproves of the entire brochure and the clamour which it is making over his name. And he condemns as incompatible with the class struggle, and consequently as objectively counter-revolutionary, the attacks which are contained in it.'

"Aragon's repudiation of his old friend André Breton and the remaining members of the surrealist group brought forth a violent attack on him in the form of a pamphlet entitled *Clown! (The end of the Aragon Affair)* and signed by René Char, René Crevel, Salvador Dali, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Benjamin Péret, Yves Tanguy, André Thirion and Tristan Tzara. A few days later Paul Eluard also

published a separate pamphlet in which he stated that he was completely severing relations with Aragon.

"The last blast in the Aragon Affair was provided by a pamphlet signed by Pierre Unik and Maxime Alexandre. As participants in the surrealist movement during many years, and as militant members of the Communist Party, they disagree with many of Breton's statements in *The Misery of Poetry*, but express their confidence in his ability to correct his errors. Aragon is censured for terming Breton a counter-revolutionist, and the authors regret that the signers of *Clown!* have failed to rise above personal considerations. They conclude:

"The bourgeoisie answers with bullets the men forced into the streets by famine to demand work and bread. The kind of poets worthy of the name are allied with these men. Let the poets pay back stroke by stroke and not allow themselves to be buried under the rubbish of the society they are helping to destroy. Let the poets know that to-day they have a fatherland to defend!"

\* \* \*

The question indirectly raised by this affair seems to be somewhat as follows: Is a militant Communist poet justified in writing any but propaganda poems or poems directly bearing on the working-class struggle? Yes, say the surrealists; and No, say Aragon, Sadoul, Alexandre and a few others. (Both Bunuel and Pierre Unik appeared in Nos. 4 and 5 of *Le Surrealisme au Service de la Révolution* in



the man who threw a stone at a bird

JOAN MIRÓ (1927)

1933.) Mr. du Von has not gone very closely into the arguments of Breton's *Misère de la Poésie*, and I have not much space to do so here myself; but it should, I think, be mentioned that Breton supports his case for surrealism by quoting Lenin as saying that the workers should be able to attain a more or less perfect knowledge of the whole field of thought, and that only a few pitiable intellectuals imagine that the workers want to read about factory life and the things they already know only too well. Surrealism being a form of psychological research in the domain of writing and painting, the surrealists are helping to lay the foundations of a new, universal culture, and should not be expected to be immediately concerned, *in their researches*, with the practical facts of political struggle, though they have always shown themselves to be deeply concerned with it in their "outside" declarations. Personally, I think that the surrealists should be regarded as desirable "fellow-travellers," and that the Communists are making a silly mistake in treating them either with scorn or suspicion simply because their work does not happen to be about strikes, hunger-marches or life in the distressed areas. They can in their own way do just

as much good for the Revolution, ultimately, as the propaganda writers are doing in theirs.

As to *The Red Front* itself, it is not a surrealist poem: it is purely propaganda; strictly speaking, it is not "poetry" at all, but prose written in the form of poetry—a prose statement, or argument, in poetic diction, enlivened with all the effects of imagery, metaphor and rhythmic rhetoric. André Breton's judgment of the poem is as follows: "I say that this poem, on account of the way it is situated in Aragon's work, and in the history of poetry, corresponds to a certain number of formal determinations that are opposed to the isolation of such and such a group of words ('Bring down the cops Comrades') in order to exploit their literal meaning, when another such group ('The stars descend familiarly upon the earth') do not give rise to the question of literal meaning. Who would dare to pretend that in prose, in the course of an article, Aragon would have written 'Bring down the cops Comrades,' when such an injunction, otherwise without real importance, is contrary to the instructions of the Communist Party?" And Stephen Spender, reviewing in *New Verse* the English translation by E. E. Cummings of

the poem, said: "If this type of propaganda has any effect at all, I do not see what that can be except to breed in people a superstitious belief in the necessity of murders and reprisals."

A very valuable estimation of the whole question of Aragon's poetry, and of the relation between poetry and propaganda, is provided by a pamphlet published in 1934, *Les Paris Sont Ouverts* by Claude Cahun, a Communist writer, who, after examining poems written by Aragon *before* his "conversion" and then poems written by him *afterwards*, comes to the conclusion that Aragon's later work represents a distinct deterioration, both in poetic and in revolutionary value. He also writes: "The most revolutionary experience in poetry under the capitalist régime having been incontestably, for France and perhaps for Europe, the dadaist-surrealist experience, in that it has tended to destroy all the myths about art that for centuries have permitted the ideologic as well as economic exploitation of painting, of sculpture, of literature, etc. . . . (ex.: the *frottages* of Max Ernst which, among other things, have been able to upset the scale of values of art-critics and experts, values based chiefly on technical perfection,

personal touch and the lastingness of the materials employed), this experience can and should serve the cause of the liberation of the proletariat. It is only when the proletariat has become aware of the myths on which capitalist culture depends, when he has become aware of what these myths and this culture mean for him and has destroyed them, only then will he be able to pass on to his own proper development. The positive lesson of this negating (*negatrice*) experience, that is to say its transfusion among the proletariat, constitutes the only valid revolutionary poetic propaganda."

By way of conclusion to this section, I should like to remark that all Marxist critics should beware of confusing *parlour* revolutionaries with *laboratory* (or work-room, studio, study) revolutionaries. Said Lenin: "Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary action."

\* \* \*

The year 1932 was also eventful for surrealism in that it saw the appearance of several important works: André Breton's *Le Revolver à Cheveux Blancs* and *Les Vases Communicants*, René Crevel's *Le Clavecin de Diderot*, Salvador Dali's film scenario *Babaouo*,

Paul Eluard's *La Vie Immédiate*, Tristan Tzara's *Où Boivent les Loups*, and the surrealist number of *This Quarter*.

Incomparably the most important of these books is Breton's *The Communicating Vessels*, in which he analyses the whole question of surrealism and particularly the surrealist study of dreams, demonstrating that inasmuch as the dream-life is an integral part of the whole life of man, it also can be investigated objectively and in the light of dialectical materialism. I do not think the book received in France the wide attention it deserved; but when a Czech translation was published recently in Prague, it was received with much enthusiasm, and the Marxist critic Zavis Kalandra wrote: "This marvellously poetic surrealist book is at the same time a scientific act . . . whose central importance to the progressive edification of marxist-leninist science should be apparent to all true Marxists." It would be impossible to summarise Breton's lengthy argument here, for the book is not a little complicated and much of its value rests on the careful documentation it contains. The title refers to the part played by surrealism as a capillary thread, or tissue,

"assuring the constant exchange that should be brought about between the interior world and the exterior world, an exchange that necessitates the continuous interpenetration of the activity of waking and the activity of sleep." It is to be hoped that an English translation of *The Communicating Vessels* will appear before long.

Paul Eluard's *The Immediate Life* placed him in the front rank of contemporary European poets, if *Capitale de la Douleur* had not already done so. There is an absolute authenticity about everything that Eluard writes, an astonishing clarity of speech and image. If I have previously referred to the poetry of Eluard as "pure," I should add, perhaps, that to seek disparagement in this term (so much abused in English criticism) is futile, since all authentic poetry is "pure"; and by authenticity I mean: direct contact with the source of poetry, a source that may well be "impure," since it is fed in its turn by all things in the world.

These two books and the five others mentioned above—two final numbers of *Le Surrealisme au Service de la Révolution*, containing notes on Hegel by Lenin, a series of remarkable enquiries on various

objects, a collection of notes by Marcel Duchamp for his painting *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Own Bachelors*, an article by Breton marking the centenary of Achim d'Arnim, the German author of *Contes Bizarres*, and other features—*Enfances* and *La Belle en Dormant*, two collections of poems by Georges Hugnet, who had just joined the surrealist group, *Les Pieds dans le Plat* by René Crevel—all prove lively activity in the surrealist movement during the period 1932-3.

In the next chapter we shall examine the most recent developments of surrealism, and consider the possibilities that lie before it.

---

## SURREALISM TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

### CHAPTER SIX

Until recently the surrealists had very seldom contributed to any but their own reviews; in 1933, however, they decided that in order to reach a new and wider public they would collaborate in the publication of *Minotaure*, a magnificently produced but somewhat expensive review, well known in this country. Whether they consider it an advantage to appear side by side with Paul Valéry and articles on Cézanne, I cannot say; but at any rate their work is now as well presented as it could be, with copious and finely produced illustrations. The seven or more numbers of *Minotaure* that have so far appeared have contained much valuable material by all the surrealists. The articles by Breton ("Picasso in his Element," "The Automatic Message," "Beauty will be Convulsive"), and by Dali ("Paranoiac-critical Interpretation of Millet's *Angelus*," "Of the Terrifying and Comestible Beauty of Modern Style Architecture," "The New Colours of Spectral Sex Appeal"), are of especial interest. *Minotaure* has also contained a number of very valuable psycho analytical studies by Dr. Jacques Lacan, Dr. Frois Wittmann and others.

In 1934 the surrealists also began to contribute to the Belgian review *Documents*, of which the number entitled *Intervention Surrealiste* is the most outstanding; it contains a manifesto occasioned by the riots of February 1934, headed *Appel à la lutte*, and signed by all the surrealists as well as by a number of other writers and artists, including Jean-Richard Bloch, Fernand Léger and André Malraux. There is also an enquiry into the unity of anti-fascist action, dated April 18th, addressed to all the chief representatives of the French workers; and a manifesto protesting against the nefarious treatment of Trotsky when passing through France.

There had been for some time a surrealist group in Brussels, consisting of René Magritte, E. L. T. Mesens, Paul Nougé and Jean Scutenaire. They now began to manifest a more lively activity and to collaborate more closely with the surrealist group in Paris. There has likewise been a surrealist group in Belgrade for some years, another in Prague, another in the Canary Islands, another in Copenhagen.

In the summer of 1934, André Breton visited Brussels and delivered a lecture there, surveying all the most recent tendencies of the movement. The

text has since been published under the title:  
*Qu'est-ce que le Surréalisme?*

In April 1935, André Breton and Paul Eluard paid a visit to Prague, and delivered a series of lectures there to various left-wing organisations. They were extremely well received. As a result of this visit the first of a series of international surrealist bulletins was published.

In May, André Breton and Benjamin Péret visited Teneriffe, where a comprehensive surrealist exhibition was held, and another bulletin has subsequently appeared.

On the return of Breton and Péret to Paris, a series of surrealist *conférences* was announced, but owing to the tragic and obscure suicide of René Crevel, whose death was deeply regretted by all who knew him, they were put off until the autumn. Items of these *conférences* include:

- Political Position of Art To-day*, by Breton.
- Mental Tests*, by Ernst.
- Discourse on Religion*, by Péret.
- The Surrealist Woman*, by Arp.
- Dali will read his poem *I Eat Gala*, and will manipulate a strange living body.
- Objective Chance as Pivot of the Surrealist Conception of Life*, by Breton.

*Poetry's Evidence*, by Eluard.

From all this it will be seen that surrealism has within the last year or so become an international movement, and is to-day more living than ever; within the near future we may expect developments on a scale unprecedented in the whole of its history. It is within the bounds of possibility that a surrealist group may be founded shortly in London. André Breton and Paul Eluard have declared their intention of visiting England in the Spring of 1936, and there is talk of a large surrealist exhibition being held at the same time. In all this can be seen something like a fulfilment of the words with which André Breton concluded his preface to the surrealist number of *This Quarter* in 1932:

"*In the meantime* it does not at all appear to us impracticable to organise in the four corners of the earth a fairly extensive scheme of resistance and experiment. This plan, as regards its modes of application, cannot be settled until there has been an interchange of the innermost desires of the live youth of all countries, and an estimate of the subversive forces which may be unleashed when it shall be applied at one given point. Owing to insufficient space at our disposal, this plan can only be barely hinted at. But beware! Enough if surrealism is restored to its true perspective, and we shall

not despair of seeing some day a storm *rising* from within this tea-cup."

\* \* \*

In 1934 was published a *Petite Anthologie Poétique du Surrealisme*, edited and with an introduction by Georges Hugnet, containing examples of the work of eleven surrealist writers and thirteen artists. The editor's introduction is particularly well done and constitutes one of the best short studies of surrealism yet written. Georges Hugnet's long poem *Onan* was published in the same year, and so were André Breton's *Point du Jour*, a collection of reprinted essays and articles covering a period of ten years, and his *L'Air de l'Eau*, a new collection of poems; Paul Eluard's *La Rose Publique*, new poems; Benjamin Péret's *De Derrière les Fagots*, caustic buffoonery full of the most striking images, such as "the strident cry of red eggs"; and Ernst's magnificent *collage* "novel," *Une Semaine de Bonté*.

Early in 1935 appeared Tristan Tzara's *Grains et Issues*, described as an "experimental dream," with copious notes. This book, with the possible exception of *L'Homme Approximatif*, is Tzara's most important work. The first section of the book consists of

prose texts, interspersed with poems, recreating once more the boundless illogical world of the dream and of uncontrolled thought; while the second section is a careful analysis of how and why this surreal world is created. On a Marxist basis Tzara examines the value of surrealist poetic activity as the foundation of the "culture" of the new society that will be brought about by the Revolution. Surrealism provides the germ of a new mentality, a new way of knowing the world, and incessantly opposes all the old pragmatisms that are struggling to maintain not only the old economic order but the old order of thought, with its unchangeable "verities" and its lop-sided "common-sense," as well.

Surrealism, as we have seen, is an activity of the mind, and cannot be limited to any one particular time or place. The surrealist movement, the immediate product of certain currents of thought that happened to be more prevalent in nineteenth-century France than elsewhere, represents the very vigorous coherent effort of a number of men to develop this activity along experimental lines and to explore its widest possibilities. And there is every reason to believe that surrealism, as a movement, is

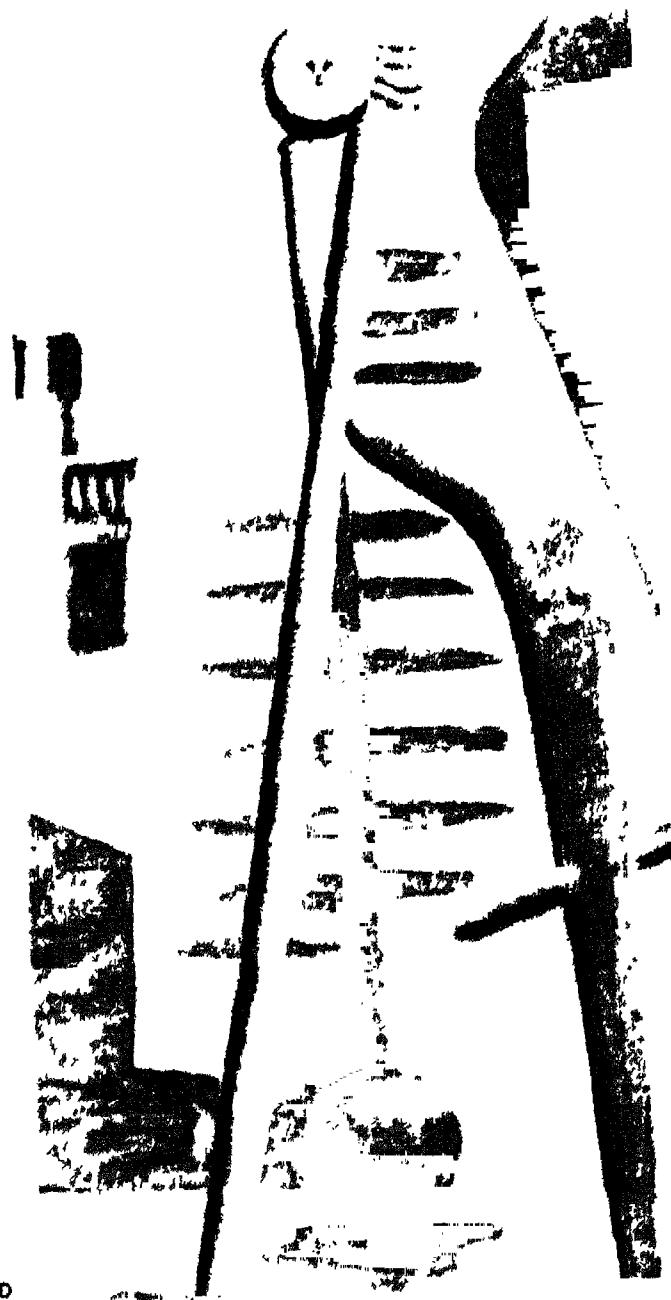
only just at the end of its earliest stages. If a really wide and properly organised international co-operation can be brought about, as there are signs that it shortly will be, surrealism may become of even more importance to the twentieth century than it is already.

There will be, of course, objections to such a co-operation. In England, for instance, there will be many to protest that surrealism is foreign to the national temperament, that it cannot grow here as it has no roots in English tradition. Such an objection could only result from a lack of understanding of what surrealism *is*. As a matter of fact, there is a very strong surrealist element in English literature; one need quote only Shakespeare, Marlowe, Swift, Young, Coleridge, Blake, Beddoes, Lear and Carroll to prove this contention. For a writer, or anyone else, to object to an attempt to establish surrealist activity in England, on the grounds that this would mean an "importation from Paris," is just as stupidly provincial as a doctor would be if he objected to the practice of psycho-analysis in England because it originated in Vienna. Surrealism itself, as it is to-day, is by no means wholly the product of

previous French culture; there is a very strong element both of German and of Spanish thought in it, synthetising as it does the philosophy of Hegel, Fuerbach, Engels and Marx, and the distinctly southern "lyricism" of painters such as Dali, Miró and Picasso. For surrealism transcends all nationalism and springs from a plane on which all men are equal.

It might be as well before concluding to summarise briefly the chief preoccupations of surrealist research during the last ten years. These fall roughly into two categories: firstly, passive or subjective; secondly, active or objective.

To the first category belong automatism, spontaneous and "pure" poetry, and the idea of the synonymity of poetry and dream. Parallel with these features, in the realm of art, may be placed *collage* and *frottage*, and the development of the idea of the element of anonymity and chance in artistic creation. From this idea of chance, or hazard (which really began in the days of Dada, with the production of poems by extracting words at random from a hat) to the paranoiac system introduced by Dali, the development is much the same as that followed



DINARD

by Freud from his *Interpretation of Dreams* to *The Psycho-pathology of Everyday Life*, in which he advances the theory that accidents are very largely predetermined by psychic necessity. Objective hazard as the pivot of the surrealist conception of life, is the subject to which Breton is at present devoting his attention; and Dali has always contended that surrealist objects "take the form of desire." No longer does a surrealist await the message or the image to arise from the vast unconscious residue of experience; he actively imposes the image of his desires and obsessions upon the concrete, daylight world of objective reality; he actively takes part in "accidents" that reveal the true nature of the mechanism that is life far more clearly than "pure psychic automatism" could.

In addition to all this we must take into consideration the unchanging political position of the surrealists in opposing bourgeois society, attacking religion, patriotism and the idea of family, and in declaring their belief in the principles of Communism and their solidarity with the proletariat of all countries.

In conclusion, tribute should be paid to André

Breton, whose energy, enthusiasm and powers of leadership have been and are still of inestimable value not only to the surrealist movement but to all those taking part in it. He is one of the most remarkable men of his time, and his influence will long continue to make itself felt in modern thought.

It is my hope that the reader will have realised by now that surrealism is not simply a way of writing or of painting, but a school of thought that may very well be playing a rôle of historical importance. The great task of this century is that of revising the old scales of value in every field, of destroying worn-out customs and institutions and of constructing a form of society in which men may be able to make full use of all their faculties. Few poets—and poets, though still unacknowledged, continue to be the legislators of the world—have set about this task with so great a thoroughness as have the surrealists. Already they have succeeded in widening and deepening the total of human experience.

---

**TRANSLATIONS**

---



---

"On the Saint-Geneviève Mountain . . . "

---

ANDRE  
BRETON

On the Saint-Geneviève mountain there is a wide drinking-place where, when night falls, all the disturbing beasts and surprising plants that still exist in Paris come to refresh themselves. You might think it would dry up did you not see, on examining things rather closer, a little red trickle that nothing can stanch. What precious blood, then, continues flowing in this place so that the feathers, down, white hairs and declorophyled leaves that it sets going turn back when they reach the only end that is visible? What princess of royal blood consecrates herself thus after her disappearing on the entreaty of all the most sovereignly tender flora and fauna of this country? What saint with apron of roses has made this divine extract flow into the veins of stone? Every evening the marvellous mould more beautiful than a breast is opened and new lips and the refreshing virtue of rose-blood join the whole of the surrounding sky, while on a boundary-stone shivers a young child counting the stars; soon it will bring back its herd from the millenary manes, from the archer or water-arrow who has three hands, one for extracting, the other for caressing, the other for shading or directing, from the archer of my days to the Alsatian dog who has one blue and one yellow eye, the dog of the anaglyphs of my dreams, the marshes' faithful companion.

(From: *Manifesto of Surrealism: Soluble Fish.*)

---

## The Spectral Attitudes

---

ANDRÉ  
BRETON

I attach no importance to life  
I pin not the least of life's butterflies to importance  
I do not matter to life  
But the branches of salt the white branches  
All the shadow bubbles  
And the sea-anemones  
Come down and breathe within my thoughts  
They come from tears that are not mine  
From steps I do not take that are steps twice  
And of which the sand remembers the flood-tide  
The bars are in the cage  
And the birds come down from far above to sing before  
these bars  
A subterranean passage unites all perfumes  
A woman pledged herself there one day  
This woman became so bright that I could no longer see her  
With these eyes which have seen my own self burning  
I was then already as old as I am now  
And I watched over myself and my thoughts like a night-  
watchman in an immense factory  
Keeping watch alone  
The circus always enchant the same tramlines  
The plaster figures have lost nothing of their expression  
They who bit the smile's fig  
I know of a drapery in a forgotten town  
If it pleased me to appear to you wrapped in this drapery  
You would think that your end was approaching  
Like mine

At last the fountains would understand that you must not  
say Fountain

The wolves are clothed in mirrors of snow

I have a boat detached from all climates

I am dragged along by an ice-pack with teeth of flame

I cut and I cleave the wood of this tree that will always be  
green

A musician is caught up in the strings of his instrument

The Black Pavilion of the time of any childhood story

Goes on board a ship that is as yet its own ghost only

Perhaps there is a hilt to this sword

But already there is a duel in this hilt

During the duel the combatants are unarmed

Death is the least offence

The future never comes

The curtains that have never been raised

Float to the windows of houses that are to be built

The beds made of lilies

Slide beneath the lamps of dew

There will come an evening

The nuggets of light become still underneath the blue moss

The hands that tie and untie the knots of love and of air

Keep all their transparency for those who have eyes to see

They see the palms of hands

The crowns in eyes

But the brasier of crowns and palms

Can scarcely be lit in the deepest part of the forest

There where the stags bend their heads to examine the years

Nothing more than a feeble beating is heard

From which sound a thousand louder or softer sounds proceed

THE SPECTRAL ATTITUDES

---

And the beating goes on and on  
There are dresses that vibrate  
And their vibration is in unison with the beating  
When I wish to see the faces of those that wear them  
A great fog rises from the ground  
At the bottom of the steeples behind the most elegant  
reservoirs of life and of wealth  
In the gorges which hide themselves between two mountains  
On the sea at the hour when the sun cools down  
Those who make signs to me are separated by stars  
And yet the carriage overturned at full speed  
Carries as far as my last hesitation  
That awaits me down there in the town where the statues  
of bronze and of stone have changed places with statues  
of wax  
Banyans banyans.

(From: *The White-haired Revolver*, 1932.)

## Three Poems

RENÉ CHAR

### POETS

*"The circle is a figure surrounded by a circular line."* RAYMOND LULIÉ.

The melancholy of illiterates in the mystery of bottles

The imperceptible disquiet of cartwrights

Pieces of money in the slender vase

In the cockle-shell of the anvil

Dwells the lonely poet

Great wheelbarrow of the swamps.

### THE PUMA OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE

TO MAURICE HEINE.

The unsullied blood takes pleasure in the rose-garden

Has mental contact with the torch

So full of juice is the caressed mane

The smell ascending to near a colony of delights

Greets the secluded wishes

Dominion of the unclad rose

Like frost under the black water sleeps the fatal toad.

### LOVE

The neuter hands of stoic skeletons to stroke your hair

Black as liquorice are the months of scarcity

You shut your eyes upon the quarry of unworkable ochre

You suck up through a hunting spear the subterranean water

You are hypnotised in space for the leaf's sake

To the drawing near of the invisible serpent

The foxglove's pith.

(From: *The Masterless Hammer*, 1934.)

(Translated by RUTHVEN TODD.)

---

## Fatal Sleep

---

RENÉ CHAR

The animals with heads like ships surround the face of the woman that I love. The mountain weeds wither under the eyelids' period of quiet. The memory of the man realises without difficulty what he believes to be the experience of his most hopeless dreams whilst at the inclination of his mirrors he continues to drain the unattainable water. And the ashes' thought?

(The man denies himself disbelief in the sincerity of the letters written to him while a child by an unknown woman. This woman unveiled for him the prophetic side of his writing. The precise black colour of the future authorised him to express a preference: he will kiss a sand-pit that is the damnation of meteorites; these virtuosi of transition readily forget their edible heads on the meat-safe shelf, at twilight.)

(Translated by RUTHVEN TODD.)

Love and Memory (Fragment)

SALVADOR  
DALI

*There are things as still as a loaf.*

In the endearing districts  
but not excessively endearing  
demarcated very quickly and politely  
predisposed to colonial influences  
a mask  
gathered in like a loan  
was  
practically  
upset  
without getting mixed up  
with  
this colonial district  
where  
there were  
several departmental  
wands  
Other things, indeterminate and  
departmental things  
functioning as  
bread  
well-brown bread  
resembling weeping  
the weeping  
resembling  
the picture of a nest  
reproduced in three colours  
the nest resembling

the word-emblem  
I shall carry furiously  
whether conditionally  
or not  
the colonially  
masked things  
united  
whether very appreciably  
or not  
by a single edge  
or  
by general cheek-bones  
or  
by several ensembles  
or  
by a balanced thing  
or  
by demi-things  
or  
by turned things  
or  
by a handle  
or  
by handles  
or  
by a thing placed  
near a piece of needlework  
headed by yards and crusts  
or  
by my sister's picture.

(1931.)

“At the End of a Long Voyage . . .”

PAUL  
ELUARD

At the end of a long voyage I always see this corridor once more, this mole, this warm shadow to which the foam of the sea prescribes pure breezes like tiny children, I always see once more the room where I came to break with you the bread of our desires, I always see once more your undressed pallor which unites in the morning with the disappearing stars. I know I am going to close my eyes again in order to rediscover the colours and conventional forms which allow me to approach you. When I open them again it will be so as to find in a corner of the room the corruptible pickaxe-sleeved parasol which causes me to doubt fine weather, the sun, life, for I no longer love you in full daylight, I regret the time when I was setting out to discover you, and also the time when I was blind and dumb before the incomprehensible universe and the incoherent system of agreement that you were suggesting to me.

Have you not sufficiently borne the responsibility of that frankness which obliged me to be continually turning your own whims against you?

What haven't you given me to think about? I now come no longer to see you except in order to reassure myself of the great mystery which still constitutes the absurd duration of my life, the absurd duration of a night.

The boats all sail away when I arrive, the storm recoils before them. A shower sets free the obscure flowers, their blossoming begins again and strikes once more the woollen walls. You are never sure of anything, I know, but the idea of falsehood and the idea of an error are so much stronger

"AT THE END OF A LONG VOYAGE . . ."

---

than we are. It is so long since the obstinate door refused to give in, so long since the monotony of hope fed boredom, so long since your smiles were tears.

We have refused to allow spectators to enter, for there is nothing to see. Remember, when you are alone, the empty stage without any scenery or actors or musicians. Thus it is: the theatre of the world, the worldly stage, and we two, we no longer know what it means. We two—I insist on those words, for at the ports of call on those long voyages we made separately, I know it now, we were really together, we really were, we were, we. Neither you nor I know how to add the time when we were apart to the time when we were together, neither you nor I know how to take one away from the other.

Each one a shadow, but in the shadow we forgot that it was so.

(From: *The Immediate Life*, 1932.)

## What the Workman Says is Never to the Point

PAUL  
ELUARD

A winter all branchy and hard as a corpse  
A man on a bench in a street that escapes from the crowd  
And is filled up with solitude  
Makes way for the banal machinery of despair  
For its mirrors of lead  
For its baths of pebbles  
For its stagnant statues  
Makes way for the neglect of good  
For the tattered memories of truth  
Black light old conflagration  
With hair lost in a labyrinth  
A man who mistook the landing the door and the key  
So as to know more so as to love more.

Where does the landscape begin  
At what time  
Where then does woman come to an end  
The evening balances over the town  
The evening rejoins the stroller in his bed  
The naked stroller  
Less greedy for a virgin breast  
Than for the shapeless star that gives suck to the night.

There are indescribable demolitions sadder than a farthing  
But nevertheless the sun escapes from them singing  
While the sky dances and makes its honey  
There are deserted walls where the idyll blossoms



Where the flaking plaster  
Cradles mingled shadows  
A rebellious fire a fire of veins  
Beneath the only wave of lips  
Take hands see eyes  
Take the landscape by force.

Behind the palace behind the rubbish-heaps  
Behind the chimneys and the cisterns  
In front of man  
On the esplanade that unrolls a coat of dust  
By fever drawn  
It is the invasion of fine days  
A plantation of blue daggers  
Beneath the opened eyelids in a crowd of leaves  
It is pleasure's heavy harvest.

The flower of flax breaks the masks  
The faces are washed  
By the colour that knows the extent.

The clear days of the past  
Their barred lions and their eagles of pure water  
Their thunder of pride inflating the hours  
With the blood of enchain'd dawns  
All across the sky  
Their diadem shrivelled on the mace of a single mirror  
Of a single heart.

WHAT THE WORKMAN SAYS IS NEVER TO THE POINT

---

But now far deeper among the abolished roads  
This song that holds the night  
This song that deafens and blinds  
That offers its arm to ghosts  
This denying love  
That struggles in anguish  
With well-soaked tears  
This torn disabled twisted ridiculous dream  
This fallow harmony  
This begging horde.

For she has desired only gold  
And love's perfection  
Her whole life long.

(From: *The Public Rose*, 1934.)

## Poem

GEORGES  
HUGNET

The chrysalis says she is the fern's perfection,  
chance is being's will,  
the hatchway is a grain of salt on a frigate's sail,  
the doors are pieces of shadow, the drawers are at play,  
the triangles are earthen,  
indolence is reddish, the lama's nose is a window,  
good-morning chases a fly on to the ceiling,  
the walls are the halt of the ultramarine and the roof is a  
pump,  
your face does not exist,  
my love is well polished,  
the sea interrogates its beaches secretly,  
living is not following a mirror's movements as best one can,  
the winged ant is an ear,  
tears are the beggars who roll to the bottom of ponds,  
a room is the bother of leaving it,  
entering it is to allow oneself everything, I wish you were  
chilly,  
desolation is a bunch of papers,  
the wind is a hand, the hand a raspberry,  
when the sea comes up, chance threads a needle,  
the shine of your fingernails is echoed by the apples,  
looking is not for much more than a pillow-case,  
habit is the eye and speaking is black,  
if I ask myself questions I dress in beetle,  
reason is the same as fear:  
the little green spot that shakes about in the red sea,  
blood is a sculpture,

P O E M

---

a book or the wherewithal to die,  
the addressee of a letter is an island-shaped stain,  
your hair is an ant-hill, a medlar-tree before a cheval-glass,  
presence and solitude are two beans in a black room,  
two beans facing one another,  
to give shade one turns on the same switch  
that immortalises the last cigarette of a man condemned to  
death  
and there you have the beheading of human justice,  
sleeping is a word  
and oracle a mania; egg, awakened dreamer,  
neither humility nor vanity is my strong point,  
the tree is a dandyism,  
a tower goes down the river, Barbary fig,  
you are my only pride, I am only pride before you,  
the images are not sufficiently distant,  
the giraffe is the year's longest eyelash,  
one must renounce all commentary,  
unlearn all that was learnt  
and live only in the incredible  
in order to live.

## Three Poems

BENJAMIN  
PÉRET

### AND SO ON

A kick in the pants once more  
and the empty sardine-tin thinks itself holy  
A kick with the heel on the jaw  
and it is a divinity  
which swims in pure honey  
not caring about protozoons  
sea-horses  
or heavenly pebbles that flutter from eye to eye  
and carry reason  
with a little sauce and some broken teeth  
into the society of cabbage-stumps  
who no longer know what to do with their heads  
since thick waters stifle in furs.

### HONEST FOLK

The quarrel between the boiled chicken and the ventriloquist  
had for us the meaning of a cloud of dust  
which passed above the city  
like the blowing of a trumpet  
It blew so loudly that its bowler-hat was trembling  
and its beard stood up on end  
to bite off its nose  
It blew so loudly  
that its nose cracked open like a nut  
and the nut spat out  
into the far distance  
a little cow-shed  
wherein the youngest calf  
was selling its mother's milk  
in sausage-skin flasks  
that its father had vulcanised.

(From: *From Behind the Fuggots*, 1934.)

### THREE POEMS

#### THE FLEAS OF THE FIELD

Work with all your strength  
Work on the land the streets the docks  
and sow there what you will  
paving-stones smoke or bottles  
but work work like a lunatic  
and dung the stones  
that they may sprout flags  
even red ones  
The rains and the winds will bless you  
if you put the hands of a watch to your ears  
and the harvest will be good as your wife's stew.

Work your own field and all the others  
with your feet and with your nose  
Break down the hedges like a bull  
while singing  
In the Revolution  
there was a worker  
who clinked with his spade  
he had only one head and two arms  
four feet and two eyes  
one ear and three teeth  
but he was a worker  
who did not waste his time.

(From: *The Great Game*, 1928.)  
(Translated by RUTHVEN TODD.)

## Force of Habit

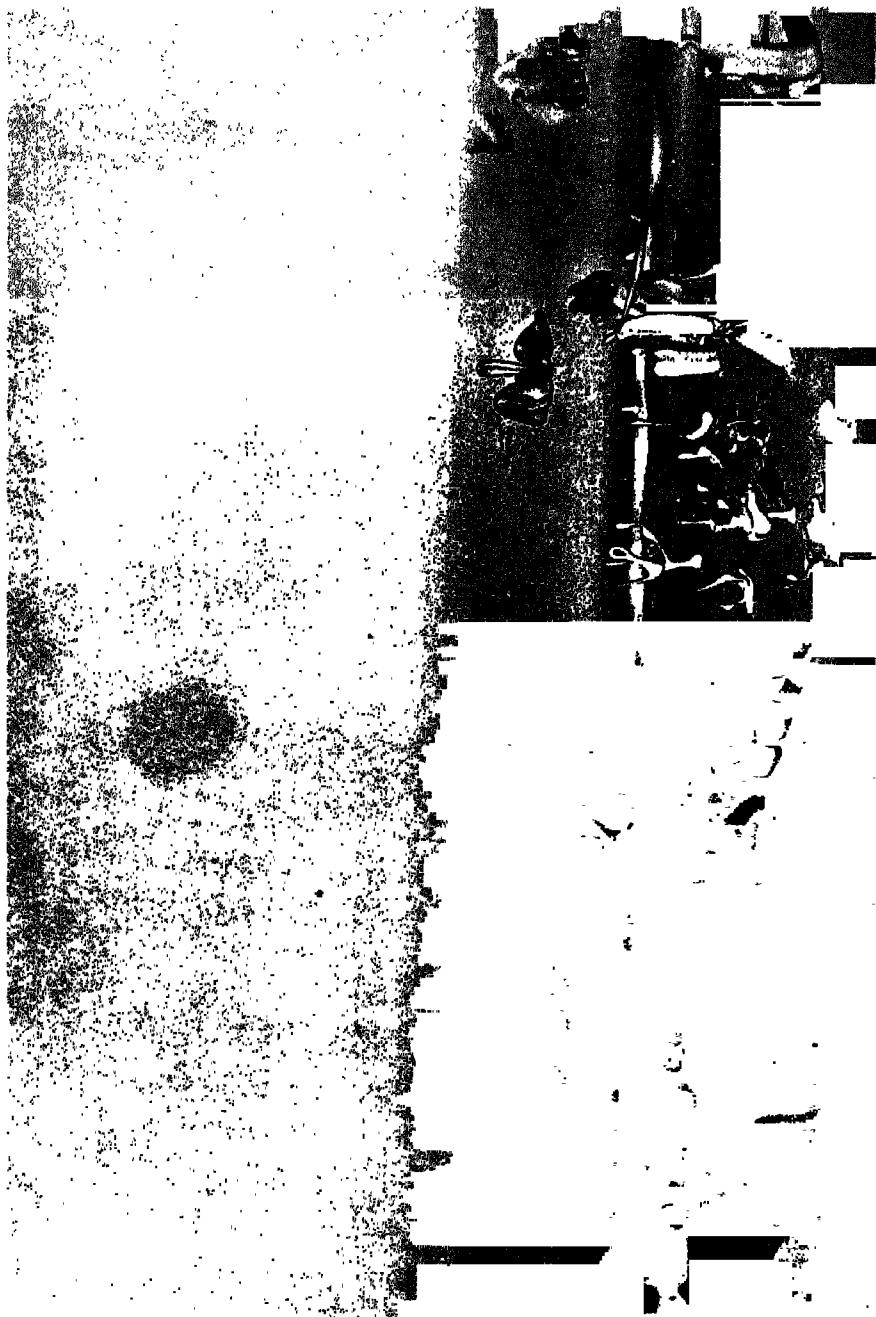
ANDRE  
BRETON  
and  
PAUL  
ELUARD

The table is placed in the dining-room; the taps give out clear water, soft water, tepid water, scented water. The bed is as large for two as for one. After the bud will come the leaf and after the leaf the flower and after rain fine weather. Because it is time, the eyes open, the body stands up, the hand stretches out, the fire is lit, the smile contends with night's wrinkles for their unmalicious curve. And they are the clock's hands that open, that stand up, that stretch out, that set light to themselves and mark the hour of the smile. The sun's ray goes about the house in a white blouse. It's going to snow again, a few drops of blood are going to fall again at about five o'clock, but that'll be nothing. Oh! I was frightened, I suddenly thought there was no longer any street outside the window, but it is there just the same as ever. The chemist is even raising his metal shutters. There will soon be more people at the wheel than at the mill. Work is sharpened, hammered, thinned down, reckoned out. Once more the hand, takes pleasure in finding the security of sleep in the familiar implement.

Provided that it lasts!

The mirror is a marvellous witness, changing all the time. It gives evidence calmly and with power, but when it has finished speaking you can see that it has been caught out again over everything. It is the current personification of verity.

On the hairpin-bend road obstinately tied to the legs of him who assesses to-day as he will assess to-morrow, on the light bearings of carelessness, a thousand steps each day



espouse the steps of the vigil. They have come already and they will come again without being invited. Each one has passed that way, going from his joy to his sorrow. It is a little refuge with an enormous gas-jet. You put one foot in front of the other and then you are gone.

The walls cover themselves with pictures, the holidays sift themselves with bouquets, the mirror covers itself with vapour. As many light-houses on a stream and the stream is in the vessel of the river. Two eyes the same, for the use of your single face—two eyes covered with the same ants. Green is almost uniformly spread over the plants, the wind follows the birds, no one risks seeing the stones die. The result is not a broken-in animal but an animal trainer. Bah! It is the indefeasible order of a ceremony already, on the whole, so very gorgeous! It is the repeating pistol which makes flowers appear in vases and smoke in the mouth.

Love, in the end, is well satisfied with seeing night clearly.

When you are no longer there, your perfume is there to search for me. I only come to get back the oracle of your weakness. My hand in your hand is so little like your hand in mine. Unhappiness, you see, unhappiness itself profits from being known. I let you share my lot, you cannot not be there, you are the proof that I exist. And everything conforms with that life which I have made to assure myself of you.

—What are you thinking about?

—Nothing.

(From: *The Immaculate Conception.*)

I      N      D      E      X

(N.B. The names in *italics* indicate those who belong or have belonged to the Surrealist group.)

*Alexandre*, Maxime, 94, 116-7  
*Apolinaire*, Guillaume, 21, 27, 34, 35, 40, 45  
*Aragon*, Louis, 9, 34, 39, 41, 54, 58, 65, 69, 72, 77, 92, 94-5, 106, 110-21  
*d'Arkim*, Achim, 125  
*Arp*, Hans, 6, 23, 26, 27, 30, 35, 73, 75, 105, 127  
*Artaud*, Antonin, 83  
  
*Baargeld*, 33  
*Bailey*, Alice, 30  
*Ball*, Hugo, 26-7  
*Barbusse*, Henri, 94  
*Baron*, Jacques, 83  
*Barès*, Maurice, 42  
*Baudelaire*, Charles, 3-5, 7, 8, 76  
*Beardsley*, Aubrey, 105  
*Beddoes*, Thomas Lovell, 132  
*Bellmer*, Hans, 105  
*Benevol*, 50  
*Berton*, Germaine, 68  
*Bertrand*, Louis, 3, 4  
*Birn*, Pierre-Albert, 34  
*Blake*, William, 82, 105, 132  
*Bloch*, Jean-Richard, 127  
*Boecklin*, 105  
*Borel*, Petrus, 3, 4  
*Bosch*, Jerome, 104  
*Bousquet*, José, 9  
*Boyle*, Kay, 79  
*Braque*, Georges, 22, 76  
*Bronner*, Victor, 105  
*Breton*, André, xii, 9, 24, 29, 34-7, 40, 42-3, 47, 51, 53-4, 56-8, 61-2, 67-70, 72-3, 76, 80, 82, 85, 89, 90, 92, 94, 97, 99, 102, 108-10, 115-20, 122-3, 125-30, 135-6  
*Breughel*, Peter, 104  
*Brunius*, Bernard, 115  
*Buffet*, Gabrielle, 30  
*Bunuel*, Luis, 91, 94-5, 116-7  
*Cahun*, Claude, 121  
*Callot*, Jacques, 104  
*Carpentier*, 25  
*Carrière*, Edgar, 83  
*Carroll*, Lewis, 9, 110, 132  
*Cendrars*, Blaise, 27  
*Cézanne*, Paul, 30, 40, 125  
*Chagall*, Marc, 105  
*Chaplin*, Charlie, 38, 81  
*Char*, René, 79, 92, 94, 103, 116  
*Charcot*, 82  
*Chirico*, Giorgio de, 18, 27, 51, 68, 73-4, 76, 105  
*Claudel*, Paul, 70, 71  
*Coleridge*, Samuel Taylor, 132  
*Cocteau*, Jean, 35  
*Crevel*, René, 49, 50, 52, 72, 79, 94, 104, 110, 116, 122, 125, 127  
*Cros*, Charles, 12, 13  
*Cummings*, E. E., 120  
*Curie*, 67  
  
*Dali*, Salvador, 15, 21, 32, 62, 76, 91, 94-7, 99, 101-2, 104, 108-10, 116, 122, 126, 128, 133, 135  
*Delteil*, Joseph, 65, 83  
*Derain*, André, 76  
*Dermée*, Paul, 38  
*Desnos*, Robert, 49, 50-2, 54, 58, 65, 73, 83, 91

Disney, Walt, xii  
*Dominguez*, Oscar, 105  
 Donato, 50  
 Ducasse, Isidore (see Lautréamont, Comte de)  
*Duchamp*, Marcel, 24, 28-9, 36, 76, 105, 108, 125  
 Ellis, Havelock, 14  
*Eluard*, Paul, 1, 7, 9, 13, 35, 38, 40, 44, 51, 53-5, 63, 72, 76-7, 92, 94, 97, 99, 110, 116, 123-4, 128-9, 130  
 Engels, 133  
 Ensor, James, 105  
*Ernst*, Max, 27, 33-4, 48, 52-4, 68, 73-6, 94, 104-8, 116, 121, 127, 130  
 Foch, 25  
*Fourrier*, Marcel, 94  
 France, Anatole, 67, 89  
 Freud, Sigmund, xi, 46, 58, 60, 135  
*Frois-Wittmann*, 126  
 Fry, Roger, 105  
 Fuerbach, 133  
*Gerard*, Francis, 58, 83  
*Giacometti*, Alberto, 64, 105, 106  
*Goemans*, Camille, 94  
*Gide*, André, 24, 114  
*Gorer*, Geoffrey, 2-3  
*Goya*, 104  
*Greco*, El, 104  
*Grigson*, Geoffrey, 75  
*Grosz*, George, 31  
*Hegel*, 110, 124, 133  
*Heine*, Maurice, 3, 143  
*Henning*, Emmy, 37  
*Henry*, Maurice, 105  
*Hopkins*, Gerard Manley, 8  
*Huelsenbeck*, Richard, 26, 27, 31  
*Hugnet*, Georges, 40, 61, 91, 125, 130  
*Hugo*, Valentine, 105  
*Hugo*, Victor, 11  
*Huysmans*, J. K., 13, 14  
 Jacob, Max, 34, 35  
*Janko*, Marcel, 26, 27  
*Jarry*, Alfred, 15-7  
*Jean*, Marcel, 105  
*Kalandra*, Zavis, 123  
*Kandinsky*, Wassily, 27  
*Kant*, 67  
*Karloff*, Boris, 91  
*Keaton*, Buster, 68  
*Klee*, Paul, 27, 76, 104  
*Lacan*, Jacques, 127  
*Lautréamont*, Comte de, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 61, 66, 81  
*Lear*, Edward, 9, 132  
*Lebey*, André, 114  
*Léger*, Fernand, 127  
*Lenin*, 25, 81, 119, 122, 124  
*Lewis*, Wyndham, 17  
*Limbour*, Georges, 83  
*Lulle*, Raymond, 65, 143  
*Maar*, Dora, 105  
*Madge*, Charles, 9  
*Magritte*, René, 84, 92, 105, 107, 108, 127  
*Maiakovsky*, Vladimir, 94-5  
*Malkine*, Georges, 94  
*Mallarmé*, Stéphane, 12  
*Malraux*, André, 127  
*Mangeot*, Guy, 11  
*Marinetti*, Arturo, 27  
*Marlowe*, Christopher, 132  
*Marx*, Karl, 133  
*Maison*, André, 68, 76, 81

A SHORT SURVEY OF SURREALISM • INDEX

Matisse, Henri, 76  
*Mesens*, H. L. T., 127  
Millet, François, 102, 105, 109, 126  
*Miró*, Joan, 73, 75, 100, 105, 107,  
    108, 133  
Modigliani, 27  
Moore, Henry, 105  
Moreau, Gustave, 76, 105  
Morise, Max, 49, 53, 58, 63  
  
*Naville*, Pierre, 58, 68, 70, 80, 83  
Nerval, Gérard de, 3-4  
*Nougé*, Paul, 94, 127  
Nouveau, Germain, 12-13  
  
*Oppenheim*, Mereth, 105  
  
Pasteur, 67  
*Péret*, Benjamin, 17, 43, 51-4, 68,  
    72, 77, 92, 94, 117, 127, 130  
*Picabia*, Francis, 28-31, 36, 39-43,  
    54, 76, 108  
*Picasso*, Pablo, xii, 22, 68, 73-4, 76,  
    101-2, 105, 107-8, 126, 133, 134  
*Ponge*, Francis, 94  
*Prampolini*, 27  
  
*Quennell*, Peter, 5  
  
*Rey*, Man, 28, 68, 73, 75-6, 91,  
    105, 108  
*Read*, Herbert, 104  
*Redon*, Odilon, 14-15, 105  
*Rembrandt*, 40  
*Renan*, 25  
*Renoir*, 40  
*Reverdy*, Pierre, 34, 66, 115  
*Ribemont-Dessaignes*, Georges, 25,  
    39, 83  
*Richez*, Charles, 114  
*Rimbaud*, Arthur, 3-4, 7-8, 11-13  
*Risner*, Marco, 94  
*Rolland*, Romarin, 114  
  
Roussel, Raymond, 19-20  
*Roux*, Saint-Pol, 71  
Roy, Pierre, 105  
  
Sade, Marquis de, 1-4, 22, 82, 96,  
    102  
*Sadoul*, Georges, 94, 111, 116-7  
*Schwitters*, Kurt, 31  
*Scutenaire*, Jean, 127  
*Seurat*, 76  
*Shakespeare*, xii, 132  
*Soupault*, Philippe, 9, 34, 39, 45-  
    7, 58, 63, 83  
*Spender*, Stephen, 120  
*Stieglitz*, Alfred, 28  
*Strysky*, Jindrich, 105  
*Survage*, Léopold, 37  
*Swift*, Jonathan, 132  
*Swinburne*, Algernon Charles, 1  
  
*Tanguy*, Yves, 73, 75, 94, 104-5,  
    117  
*Thirion*, André, 94, 117  
*Titus*, Edward, W., 88  
*Trotsky*, 127  
*Tzara*, Tristan, 11, 23, 25-7, 29-  
    32, 35-6, 39-44, 90, 94, 107,  
    110, 117, 123, 130-1  
  
*Uccello*, Paolo, 76, 104  
*Unik*, Pierre, 116-7  
  
Vaché, Jacques, 24  
*Valentin*, Albert, 94  
*Valéry*, Paul, 126  
*Vichnevsky*, V., 112  
*Vitrac*, Roger, 54, 63, 83  
*Von*, Jay du, 111, 119  
  
*Wilde*, Oscar, 13  
*Young*, Edward, 132

